

THIS IS WHO I AM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMALE PURITY
PLEDGERS' SENSE OF IDENTITY AND SEXUAL AGENCY

by

KATRINA N. HANNA

B.A., Arkansas Tech University, 2010

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication Studies
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2016

Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Soo-Hye Han

Abstract

At the turn of the 21st century, an ideological movement defined by many as the modesty movement helped push sexual abstinence as a controversial yet significant public issue in the United States. Concerned with a “hyper-sexualized” culture, modesty advocates urged young women to make a pledge to remain pure until marriage. Following the the growth of the movement, feminist scholars have been critical of the movement and the potentially detrimental consequences of purity pledges on young women’s identity, sexuality, and sexual agency. This study takes a step back from this critical view of purity pledges and listens to young women’s lived experience of making a purity pledge and living a life of purity. Specifically, this study asks how purity pledgers understand and enact purity and how they perceive their sexuality and sexual agency.

To answer these questions, qualitative interviews were conducted with nine young women who at some point in their life made a purity pledge. A thematic analysis revealed three major themes: 1) living a pure life is situated within multifaceted perspectives on purity, 2) living a life of purity consists of negotiating multiple “selves,” and 3) living a life of purity grants and reinforces a sense of agency. A composite description illustrates that religious messages, parents, peers, and sex education classes continue to influence their understanding of purity and sexuality. This project concludes with a discussion of theoretical implications surrounding the idea of a “crystallized self” and practical implications of this study on an organizational, familial, and personal level.

Key terms: *Purity, purity pledge, sexuality, sexual agency, identity, crystallized self*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Preface - Summer 2006.....	vii
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	8
Liberating Women’s Sexuality	8
The Evangelical Modesty Movement.....	11
Speaking of Sex: Understanding Purity and Modesty	17
Young Women as Sexual Individuals.....	20
Sexuality	20
Sexual Agency	23
Theoretical Background	28
Chapter 3 - Methods.....	32
Researcher Standpoint	33
Procedures for data collection.....	35
Participants.....	35
Procedures.....	36
Data analysis	38
Chapter 4 - Analysis.....	39
Purity Defined and Enacted	39
Religious influence	40
Parental influence.....	42
Peer influence.....	45
Sex education influence	47
Theme 1: Living a pure life is situated within multifaceted perspectives on purity.....	49
Enactments of purity in various contexts.....	54
Internal enactments.	55
Physcial enactments.	56
Within the context of marriage.	59

Identity and Sexual Agency	60
Theme 2: Living a life of purity consists of negotiating multiple “selves”	60
Within the context of marriage	63
Theme 3: Living a life of purity grants and reinforces a sense of agency	64
Composite Description	70
Chapter 5 - Discussion	74
Theoretical implications	74
Purity and a “crystallized self”	74
Sexuality and a “crystallized self”	79
Practical implications.....	82
Chapter 6 - Conclusion	84
Future research.....	85
References.....	89
Appendix A - Interview Protocol.....	101

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must thank Dr. Soo-Hye Han for the countless hours and constant effort she put in this project. Without a doubt, this project would not be what it is without her guidance and thoughtful feedback. A graduate student could not ask for a more dedicated thesis advisor and mentor. Thank you, Soo-Hye.

Second, I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Sarah E. Riforgiate and Dr. Greg Paul. Not only am I grateful for their patience and willingness to be on my committee, but I know that the expertise and perspective they brought only enhanced this project.

Finally, I would like to thank Darren Epping and Emily Roth for lending their support and ears through the duration of this project. Your willingness to listen to my ideas and frustrations was on numerous occasions a source of release and comfort.

Dedication

For my parents. Your endless love, support, and words of encouragement my entire life has
given me so much strength.

Dad, in more ways than you can ever know, you have been the rock on which I stand.

Mom, the woman you are today is the woman I hope to become.

I love you both.

Preface – Summer 2006

In a borrowed dress, I wait nervously in line among other young girls who are dressed similarly to me. There is high anxiety and excitement as we wait for our moment. The double doors open, this is it. In one last nervous act, I pull up on the top of the strapless dress - which my thin frame cannot fill out - to secure it in its proper place before I step through the doors. The applause and approving smiles that greet my entrance remind me that this is no ordinary moment. As I reach the end of the aisle, I look up to see the other girls who all share the same look that I am sure is reflective of the expression on my face: pride. That is what I see in their eyes. As the last girl steps onto the stage, we begin reciting an oath we all had memorized; one that already influenced the way I saw the world and my relationship to it. I had been trained, given the all the necessary tools, and now I *must* uphold that promise. On that day, in front of my family and church, I swore that above all else I would fight to remain pure.

I was fourteen years-old when I made my purity pledge. Looking back, this pledge was not something I would have decided on my own. This public swearing to remain pure was the climatic ending to a summer-long purity course that was facilitated through my church's youth group. I do not remember much about the purity classes except the conversations were often vague about defining sexual behaviors and what was (or was not) allowed before entering a biblical marriage. For the first couple of years following that summer, I had succeed in upholding that promise. However, as I began maturing and my relationships began evolving, that oath became a source of constant guilt. For years, I found myself in the center of a vicious cycle: engage in any sexual behavior, feel guilt, repent to remain pure, and repeat. The source of guilt was based in my failure to uphold the ultimate goal of keeping my purity pledge:

She has never been held so intimately that she knows the smell of any man's skin but his. She has no one to compare his gentle touch and caress to. Can you imagine how hot he would be to her? Now that is what God wants sex to be. No comparison. No disappointment. No guilt or shame. Only good, clean fun between husband and wife. (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004, p. 21-22)

This ultimate goal is from the purity text I read during the summer of 2006. For the authors, this is what the ideal marriage between a man and wife should be. After my first "heavy" make out session at the age of sixteen, I broke into tears in my bedroom as I re-read this passage. I still cannot quite articulate the amount of dread I felt because I had already failed. That intimate moment allowed me to feel his gentle touch in my hair; I already had someone to compare my future husband to. After one mistake, my dream was destroyed. I could never convince myself that it was still possible to be seen as "pure" in the eyes of God, but that it was impractical.

To date, I reflect on my purity pledge as being a difficult and often negative source of memories. Yet, I know that it continues to be a noteworthy moment in my life which still influences the woman I am becoming. What I can say is that being raised in the Christian faith, which trained me to approach sex and my sexuality in a particular way, has given me a specific view and relationship to the world. This ideological background specifically shapes how I think about female sexuality and the intricate negotiation that ensues when positioned in both a religious and cultural framing which are often situated as being at odds with each other. In the end, this purity pledge still defines who I am today: a young, developing scholar who is fascinated by how messages about sex and purity shape who we are and how we enact the various aspects of our identity, sexuality, and sexual agency.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

I like to call myself the preacher of purity. I wanted to prove my word to my father. The decision came from honoring God and honoring my father. He [her father] was very excited and it's like a child and they bring home a progress report. [The] whole message is not to condemn anyone...

We believe God will restore you. – Brelyn Freeman (Mohny, 2015, para. 1-7)

Take this pledge and God will love you so much and be so proud of you, they told me. If you wait to have sex until marriage, God will bring you a wonderful Christian husband and you'll get married and live happily ever after, they said. Waiting didn't give me a happily ever after.

Instead, it controlled my identity for over a decade, landed me in therapy, and left me a stranger in my own skin. I was so completely ashamed of my body and sexuality that it made having sex a

demoralizing experience. – Samantha Pugsley (Pugsley, 2014, para. 17)

At the turn of the 21st century, an ideological movement defined by many as the modesty movement (Hahner, 2008) helped push sexual abstinence as a significant public issue to the forefront of American life (Gardner, 2011). At the center of this modesty movement in the United States were evangelical Christians. The evangelical perspective on purity, which prizes waiting until marriage to engage in sexual behaviors, helped modesty advocates construct the movement through religious instructions based on Christian-based beliefs about premarital sex (Molsener, 2015). Keeping in line with evangelical beliefs of self-control and self-policing (see Foucault, 1978/1990), U.S. modesty advocates have created a modesty movement beyond the boundaries of education which “encourages young people to pledge their commitment to wait to have sex until marriage” (Gardner, 2011, p. 3).

As the larger public sphere began picking up on the evangelical modesty movement, its ideologies began saturating into the fabric of American culture (Carpenter, 2005). As seen in the following headlines: “Like a Virgin (Sort Of)” (2002), “A is for Abstinence” (2001), “1 in 5 teenagers has Sex Before 15” (2003), and “More in High School are Virgins” (2002) popular news outlets of the time began focusing on the sexual behaviors of adolescents and young teens. The nexus of most of these publications was whether or not teens were losing their virginity or keeping it. One *New York Times* front-page story argued that adolescents “cannot escape mixed messages about sex, or the complication of deciding if, when, and how to sample it. They are picking from a new multiple-choice menu, where virginity and oral sex can coexist” (Bernstein, 2004, para. 4). By providing a journalistic view on the movement, these messages offered a variety of perspectives on sexuality, purity, and abstinence, which further imbedded the purity mindset into American life and culture (Carpenter, 2005).

From a legislative and educational perspective, abstinence-only programs, which emphasize how abstinence is the best choice for teenagers, grew in number as funding kept coming in (Gardner, 2011). For more than a quarter of a century, beginning with the Reagan administration in 1981, the federal government has been pouring tax-payer money into these abstinence-only programs (SIECUS, 2015). Between 1996 and 2006, funding for these programs grew exponentially (SIECUS). For example, the passing of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 has helped put more than \$1.5 billion in federal funding to support abstinence-only education in the U.S (Gardner). In 2010, the Obama administration and Congress cut two primary funding streams: Community Based Abstinence Education grant and portions of the Adolescent Family Life Act (SIECUS). However, due to negotiations with the Affordable Care Act, in March of

2010, the Title V abstinence program was re-funded which allocated \$50 million each year (2011-2014) running up a grand total of \$250 million (SIECUS).

With all of this federal funding, advocates of abstinence-only education point to decreased rates of unwanted teen pregnancies and abortions as signs of the program's effectiveness: a decrease of 34 percent between 1991 and 2005 (Gardner, 2011). Unfortunately, the majority of research reveals that abstinence-only education is not effective (ACLU, 2015; SIECUS, 2015). Most importantly, evidence suggests that

sexuality education that stresses the importance of waiting to have sex while providing accurate, age-appropriate, and complete information about how to use contraceptives effectively to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can help teens make healthy and responsible life decisions. (ACLU, 2015, para. 1)

Yet, unlike funding for abstinence-only education, there has not been any federal funding to promote such education. In the end, the subsequent residue of this massive influx of messages from religious organizations, newspapers, popular texts, and education programs, which all focus on young people's sexual behaviors, is still palpable today. These conventions and sex-education classes are still in full-force. In other words, the modesty movement's rhetoric, which encourages women to make public and private vows to live a life of abstinence until marriage, continues to be well-funded, strong, and everywhere (Valenti, 2010).

Three of the most well-known purity organizations, True Love Waits, the Silver Ring Thing, and the Father-Daughter Purity Ball are credited as being the heart and soul of the contemporary evangelical modesty movement. Founded in 1993, True Love Waits organizes an event that is similar to a large youth rally. Testimonials, evangelists, and guest speakers who either have made a purity pledge or have engaged in premarital sex and since then have repented

provide personal narratives on their experiences. Interjected with miniconcert-based activities and music, the climax of this event is the call for the audience members to sign a purity pledge card. Since its founding, the True Love Waits campaign has seen over 2.5 million American youth take their pledge and its charge for abstinence has been taken up by the Roman Catholic Church and Assemblies of God (“True Love Waits”, 2015). Similar to True Love Waits, the Silver Ring Thing, founded in 1995, has held over 1,100 events nation-wide with an estimate of 635,000 young people being reached (“Silver Ring Thing”, 2015). Both of these groups also promote their messages of sexual purity through the selling of abstinence-based bibles, devotional guides, jewelry, clip art, curriculum, and a script for a commitment service.

First held in 1998, the Father-Daughter Purity Ball consists of an extravagant evening involving dances and a three-course dinner in which fathers shower their daughters with attention. The climax of the ball occurs when the daughters pledge to remain pure by naming their fathers as the keepers of their virginity. Since the organizers of this event believe that fathers should “cherish [their] daughters as regal princesses,” fathers are expected to be role models of purity and integrity for their daughters (“Generations of Light”, 2007). The common thread of these purity organizations is that individuals who identify with the movement must enact modesty. To that end, the organizers of these conventions provide the youth with disciplining techniques to increase the likelihood of maintaining modesty. Most of these techniques can be found in the various abstinence bibles and guidance tools sold at these events. These books provide a clearer understanding of how modesty advocates placed their emphasis on the embodied aspect of purity.

The purity movement and subsequent discourse are not limited to just women. Broadly speaking, the movement can be seen as a call for both young men and women to take back

control of their bodies. However, young women are and have increasingly become the focal points of purity pledges (Manning, 2015). This imbalance of the modesty movement is bound in the historical public move to police women's bodies since women are often considered as the holders of cultural and social morality (Valenti, 2010). Two primary areas of research focusing on this movement have been concerned with how effective the movement was and what cultural and social ramifications exist today, especially for young women (Manning, 2015). Abstinence-only programs and purity pledges have been heavily critiqued by feminist and critical scholars (e.g. Doan & Williams; Valenti, 2010) who conclude that "such programs [are] sexist, harmful to the self-esteem of women, ignorant of scientific research, and ineffective" (Manning, 2013, p. 2512).

Recently, scholars have begun analyzing the discourse constituting the modesty movement. Through her ethnographic work, Gardner (2011) investigated what arguments are made at a variety of evangelical purity balls and conferences. Gardner primarily examined how the organizers and guest speakers at these purity seminars attempted to make chastity "sexy" by using popular cultural texts and images to support evangelical, Christian beliefs about sex. Based on qualitative interviews with families with children who made purity pledges, Manning (2015) derived several themes on how American families view and attempt to make sense of female sexuality. He found that, on the one hand, the families perceived that young women who become sexuality active will suffer greater public shaming than their male counterparts; while on the other hand, the same families articulated that young girls are incapable of managing their own sexuality. While these studies advance our understanding of the discourse surrounding the modesty movement, less is known about how those who take the purity pledge either publicly or privately experience and continue to experience making the pledge.

This study extends the previous research on purity pledges and the impact it has on young women. As the previously noted research has found, the plethora of messages about sex continue to impact the ways that young women understand their sexuality and, therefore, their identity (Manning, 2013). This project has a particular interest in female identity and how it is negotiated within a purity mindset. More specifically, this study examines how messages about sex and sexuality influence young women's identities. From a historical perspective, identity was once understood as a fixed and stable entity that is shaped by pre-determined social roles (Abrudan, 2011). Modern thought has called into question this notion of identity which allows scholars to consider how self-constituted, autonomous individuals choose which socially-defined role(s) they are to enact and adhere to (Kellner, 2000).

This latter perspective on identity suggest that individuals employ several roles or "selves" based on context (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). This postmodern turn in identity construction presupposes a "self," specifically in relation to sexuality, that is seen as a performance confined within socially constructed ideals of sex and gender (Butler, 1993; Monro, 2005). With respect to this view on identity, this study broadly conceptualizes identity by how individuals "construct, perceive, and interpret themselves and how they present themselves to others" (Abrudan, 2012, p. 4). For communication scholars, language is utilized as a tool to the extent that communication and control are connected further positioning this "self" to become "an object to be controlled" (Deetz, 1973, p.41). From this view, when an individuals' sense of identity and agency comes to the forefront, the critic must be attuned to the numerous ways language sets limits on "what is possible" in terms of reacting and communicating within a given context (Martinez, 2011). Ultimately, the postmodern turn in identity construction prioritizes how various message sources utilize methods of interpellation (Althusser, 1971) to call

individuals to self-subscribe themselves to the worldviews being proposed (Atkins-Sayre, 2010). In this case, worldviews surrounding conceptions of modesty and purity.

To sum, this study examines the lived experience of making a purity pledge and how young women who made the pledge continue to make sense of that experience. It is my objective to take a step back from the previous research that focused on health and critical/feminist critiques and to explore how making a purity pledge has shaped their views of identity, sexuality, and sense of agency. Through the framework of phenomenology, I use in-depth interviews to examine how young women's experiences have influenced their sexual identity and agency to date. It is my hope to gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences of young women, like Freeman and Pugsley (quoted at the beginning of the chapter), and shed light on how the modesty movement has influenced their perception of who they are and who they have become.

The next chapter reviews existing literature on young women's sexuality, identity and agency as well as how modesty advocates and feminist/critical scholars approach female sexuality. Chapter three describes the methodological framing of qualitative inquiry while making note of the researcher's standpoint. Chapter four details the thematic analysis of living a life of purity. Chapter five discusses the theoretical and practical implications derived from the analysis chapter. The concluding chapter illustrates the limitations of the study and a call for continued research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Sexuality and the surveillance of sexual activities have long been a site of social order (Foucault, 1978/1990). In general, this cultural emphasis on regulating sexual behaviors has granted scholars and scientists the grounds to generate a deeper understanding of experiences tied to an individual's sexuality (Manning, 2015). Since sexuality and sexual behaviors are continuously being politicized, when questions of one's sexual identity proceeds into the foreground, maintenance of deviance, morality, and propriety become necessary to uphold social order (Douglas, 1966; Manning, 2009). Western culture has historically seen attempts to police and control the sexual behaviors of individuals (Foucault, 1978/1990). The modesty movement of the 21st century is the most contemporary example of a public move to regulate individuals' sexual behaviors (Molsener, 2015). To understand this movement, this chapter will review 1) how first and second wave feminism influenced more accepting views on premarital sex, 2) the rise of modesty movement, and 3) how modesty advocates and feminist scholars have approached female sexuality and purity. More specifically, I will discuss how this background leads to important questions surrounding young women's identity, sexuality, and sexual agency. The literature review will conclude with an argument for a phenomenological approach to examine sexuality and purity.

Liberating Women's Sexuality

The meeting at Seneca Falls in July 1848 is often referred to as the beginning of first wave feminism in the United States (Dumenil, 2012). Although this first wave of feminism advocacy included a variety of white women, the majority of active feminists at the time were religious and conservative (Dicker, 2008). Therefore, first-wave feminists are rarely considered to be radical especially in relation to the reproductive rights of women (Dumenil, 2012). Instead,

first wave feminists focused on expanding legal standing to women by gaining them the right to sue, own property, and vote (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003).

The second wave feminist movement, which began in the early 1960s, shifted attention to gaining “full human rights for women” (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 9). Betty Friedan (1963), acclaimed “mother” of second wave feminism, ignited a whole new feminist agenda (Poirot, 2009). The second wave’s broadest goal began in the 1960s when mostly working women beginning calling attention to gender relations in paid labor (Nicholson, 1997). Following the Women’s Right movement and the Women’s Liberation movement of the same decade, this new feminist agenda began focusing on the historical oppression of women in both the public and private spheres (Nicholson). Although these two second wave movements were interested in a number of issues (i.e. economic oppression of women, socially constructed ideals of femininity/masculinity, and the like), one of its primary goals was the expansion of reproductive rights and sexual liberation of women’s bodies. More specially, second wave feminists demanded that the federal government expand access to child care, abortion, and birth control (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003).

The second wave feminism movement produced an active narrative about women’s right to make decisions about her body (Gordon, 2002). Early years of the 1960s saw the advent of the contraceptive pill (Engelman, 2011). The following five years saw a swift increase in the number of women using the pill from 1.2 million in 1962 to 6.5 million in 1965, which made it the most popular form of birth control of the time (Nikolchev, 2010). Subsequent years (1965-1967) called into question the “legality, federal support, and technological improvements of birth control and abortion” and what moral implications were likely to occur from such advancements (Engelman, 2011, p. 182). For the second wave radical feminists, birth control meant greater

opportunities for family planning which would only make child bearing and planning safer for women (Gordon, 2002). It was this leftist group of radical feminists that devoted their time to the issues of sexuality and reproduction during the 1960s through the early to mid-1980s (Engelman, 2011). Their primary argument, borrowed from first wave feminist icon Margaret Sanger (1919), proposed that women must own and control their own bodies. In other words, the radical thought-process of second wave feminism

reintroduced, as part of a general campaign for women's equality, the view of birth control as a reproductive right, as a tool for individual (not just family) self-determination and sexual freedom, with an emphasis on women's special need for reproduction control. (Gordon, 2002, p. 359)

The decades leading up to the modesty movement created a public discourse that encouraged women to take control of their sexuality, health, and body by taking a stand on when they would engage in sexual behaviors (Engelman, 2011). The second wave feminists' tactical focus on the rights of the individual woman to make the decisions to how, when, and with whom they would partake in sexual behaviors (Hahner, 2008) would create a sexualized climate that called into question the "image of the traditional western heterosexual and patriarchal family" (Condit, 1994, p. 213). Although the media did not begin paying attention to second wave feminists until 1970 (Dow, 1999), technological advances like the first test tube baby being born in 1978 did push the norms associated with childbearing, parenting, and the family unit (Condit, 1994).

A recent statistical analysis conducted by Finer (2007) revealed that not only are the majority of both males and females participating in premarital sex, but the averages between the two sexes have been roughly similar over the past 40 years. In relation to second wave

feminism's influence and the increase in the accessibility of effective contraception, there was a slight increase in the number of women who had premarital sex during the years 1964-1973 (Finer, 2007). However, it is important to note that this same study found that, by the age of 44, nine out of ten women born in the 1940s had sex outside a marital relationship. Finer's (2007) study notes that the only significant changes in rates of women engaging in premarital sex over time are that the average age for first sexual encounter continues to slowly decline while women are waiting until a later age to marry.

These statistics point to a contemporary mindset that is more open to couples who cohabitate before marriage (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Taking these two lines of thought together, the last 40-50 years has produced a culture in which living together has become a part of the "courtship process for marriage" in which almost all Americans have sex before marriage (Teachman, 2003, p. 444). This historical reflection provides two notable points of fact. First, the idea that women (and men) are engaging in premarital sex is not something unique to the past two to three decades (Finer, 2007; Teachman, 2003). Second, the technological advancements of contraceptive pills for women may have played a key role in women feeling more enabled to pursue sexual activity outside the confines of marriage (Gordon, 2002).

In the end, this political and social climate established by the second wave feminists and encouraged by popular media outlets became the basis for the rise of the modesty movement and, more specifically, the reason why young women became their focal point. Although Finer's (2007) research shows that women (at least since the mid-20th century) have been engaging in premarital sex, reviews of mediated messages about premarital sexual behaviors indicate that American culture has become more lax and accepting of such practices within public discourse (Arnett, 2000). Ultimately, second wave feminism acts as a precursor to the subsequent modesty

movement rhetoric. In this light, the increased availability of birth control for women, coupled with more accepting messages about premarital sex and cohabitation, created a cultural norm that altered the behaviors of young women which became a source of concern for evangelical Christians (Moslener, 2015).

The Evangelical Modesty Movement

As a reaction to these more accepting views on contraception and cohabitation, religious messages sought to push back against what was becoming sexually normative behaviors for young men and women. Starting in the late 1990s the evangelical modesty movement began making strategic choices to return young women back to the pre-second wave feminist ideology (Hahner, 2008). As the modesty movement began gaining public attention, media outlets also witnessed a shift in religious messages becoming more accessible to the larger public (Koenig & Guchtenerie, 2007). Even before second wave feminism gained substantial ground in the United States, the early 20th century experienced a push to make religion more private (Nynas & Yip, 2012). This move was further encouraged by secularists' beliefs, which relocated and kept religion in the private sphere (Nynas & Yip). The turn of the 21st century has brought a de-privatization of religion and religious beliefs through larger public discourse facilitated by democratic politics (Koenig & Guchtenerie). This gained public awareness stems from the reframing of "the ongoing tensions between religious cultures and civic potential life" (Dillion, 2010, p. 142).

With the expansion of mediated technologies, a deregulation of religious ideas granted a larger space for religious discourses to take a role in the public sphere (Lynch, et al., 2012). In other words,

in many western societies we have witnessed how various forms of media provide new and significant platforms for debates and negotiations about sexuality and gender and how these platforms make space for a plurality of both religious and secular voices and claims. (Nynas & Yip, 2012, p. 4)

Without the de-privatization of religion and religious-based beliefs and, the expansion of political talk focusing on religious topics, the modesty movement would not have made such an impact within the United States (Molsener, 2015). Further, the turn of the millennium saw a shift in evangelical, Protestant churches appropriating “secular” forms (e.g. music, popular television shows and movies, and celebrities) to reach a broader prospective audience (Miller, 1997). This blending of religious and nonreligious cultures was a strategic move to draw in more adolescents (Einstein, 2008). As the pieces seemed to fall into place at the right time, evangelical Christians seized the opportunity to reclaim some of their ideological influence by getting people to talk about sex.

Since traditional (heterosexual and religious) nuclear families are the fabric of American culture for evangelicals, behaviors of propriety and modesty have often been a site of concern (Shalit, 1999). A child born outside of a heterosexual, married couple is seen as a “threat” to the stability of society and country; a single mother is not the ideal parent (Hahner, 2008). More specifically, outside variations of historical context,

purity advocates have asserted sexual immorality as a cause and consequence of national decay, responding with moral regulations derived from religious values and nationalist ideologies. Sex and national survival are the poles around which evangelicals have constructed an American identity, asserting their own value system to be the cornerstone of a thriving nation state. (Molsener, 2015, p. 5)

Hendershot (2004) argues that the primary rhetorical move utilized by the evangelical modesty advocates is one bound within a therapeutic rhetoric that combines psychological language of self-improvement, self-care, and self-development with the spiritual take on personal transformation which is only possible through the assistance of Jesus Christ. To reach the larger secular public, the modesty movement is

heavily indebted to so-called secular definitions of the therapeutic and asserts a taxonomy of rehabilitation described in three stages: the eruption of the problem, the confession and diagnosis of the problem, and, finally, the solution or cure for the problem. (Moslener, 2015, p. 120)

The primary difficulty evangelical modesty advocates face (through this blending of health and religious language) is that since sin is understood as something to be endured rather than cured, the final phase of the “healing process” is underplayed. For “hyper-sexualized” teens, the underplaying of the “cure” only provides them with the ability to manage their sexual desire without any proof (or hope) that this “problem” will cease to exist (Hendershot, 2004).

Although not all elements of the movement (purity balls, conference, books, testimonials, and curriculum) used the facets of this therapeutic rhetoric, the majority employed this language. For example, for the heavily-religious organizations, such as True Love Waits and the Father-Daughter Purity Ball, their primary emphasis is on the negative spiritual outcomes of premarital sex. Though True Love Waits occasionally mentions the physical or emotional aspects of engaging in premarital sex, their sole and initial purpose was to position sexuality within the spiritual development of adolescents (Gardner, 2011). On the other hand, Silver Ring Thing, throughout its two decades stint, has come to provide a live performance that encompasses all of the therapeutic concerns of emotional, physical, and spiritual damage (Moslener, 2015). In its

two and a half hour show, *Silver Ring Thing* advocates that engaging in premarital sex is severe enough to warrant a behavioral change. It is through these live performances that attract thousands of teenagers and adolescents in which skits, testimonials, and sermons are able to fulfill the first stage of the therapeutic process: engaging in premarital sex and sexual behaviors in general is bad for the spirit and body.

What has set this modesty movement apart from previous attempts is the new found emphasis on the second stage of the therapeutic process: the confession (Moslener, 2015). As discussed earlier, this movement was able to shift the historically private act of confessing one's sins or holding oneself accountable privately into the public sphere. For this movement, the act of confession is two-fold: public statements of repentance or testimony and private acts of confessing one's sins to Christ (Hendershot, 2004). For the adolescents who attended the public events and had not broken their pledge, the use of confession allows them to continually self-monitor their actions and thoughts based on the testimonies of others (Gardner, 2011). By hearing the stories and experiences of others, purity-pledgers can diagnose and re-diagnose their unique challenges by critically examining how they measure up to the expectations put in place by their pledge through large-scale conventions, private youth-group classes, or individually with the guidance of a purity textbook (Hendershot, 2004).

For the teens who make their pledges in private, confession not only plays a significant role, but the private act of confessing appears to be more effective than the public (Rosenbaum, 2009). In other words, research that has compared the sexual behaviors of pledgers with those of non-pledges reveals that when a purity pledge is made publically there is no significant statistical difference in sexual behaviors being delayed between the two groups (Bersamin, et al., 2005). This same line of research concludes that purity pledges that are more likely to "stick" are those

made in non-formal, private spaces in which the pledger feels that the decision was made personally without societal pressures (Bersamin, et al.).

Since the mechanics of the therapeutic rhetoric emphasize the constant, internal, and private act of confessing and self-monitoring, it would make sense that young women and men who make the personal decision to remain pure are more likely to be successful in maintaining that vow. Although thousands of young men and women have been making public vows to remain pure until marriage through the large-scale conferences like The Silver Ring Thing, if those public oaths are to “stick,” that choice and lifestyle has to be continuously internalized by the individual without feeling religious or societal pressures (Lipsitz et al., 2003). The decision to remain pure (and the ability to keep that promise) may be more deeply ingrained in one’s sense of who they are and the type of life they wish to live regardless of religious upbringing and familial pressure. In other words, this private confession no longer called for the admission of sins to a priest, but through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Moslener, 2015).

Whether through the public or private avenue, this circular process of re-evaluating their shortcomings permits these individuals to undergo the final stage, the cure, as they attempt to start over rather than achieve some final end-goal (Moslener, 2015). Often referred to as “second virginity,” this type of therapeutic goal, profoundly influenced by Christian discourse about rebirth and redemption, allows the modesty movement to reach a larger population of young men and women who may have already engaged in sexual behaviors (Gardner, 2011). Ultimately, the cure for both the pure and impure turning away from sexual behaviors is gaining the necessary skills to manage their sexual urges.

In the end, the blending of “conservative” ideals about premarital sex and contemporary ideals of a more accepting, casual approaches to sex provides a toolbox full of various discourses

from which adolescents and young adults can choose to make sense of how they approach sex and purity (Valenti, 2010). The background of the evangelical modesty movement discussed above points to the emergence of the purity mindset during the 21st century and the strategies employed by modesty advocates to make purity a possibility for young teens. In the next section, I will review the various ways that young women's identity, sexuality, and agency have been previously examined.

Speaking of Sex: Understanding Purity and Modesty

As women continue to be upheld as the pillars of cultural morality and purity, modesty advocates place an emphasis on the sexual behaviors of young women (Fahs, 2010). From a Protestant framework, the term “virgin” has been associated with women while “chastity” is typically applied to men (Kelly, 2000). The differences in these identifiers imply that “sexual purity and abstinence were innate in women but had to be cultivated in men” (Carpenter, 2005, p. 19). In response to the expansion of reproductive rights and birth control pill, modesty advocates were alarmed by the “hyper-sexuality” of the American public and how this altered the behaviors of young women (Gardner, 2011).

Based on this traditional perspective on female sexuality, it is important to discuss how abstinence, purity, and modesty have been conceptualized by modesty advocates, abstinence-only education classes, and adolescents themselves. This brief background becomes even more significant when religious-based messages (from modesty advocates and abstinence-only education classes) about abstinence often fail to match the actual behaviors of adolescents and teens which leaves them uninformed about safe-sex practices (Bruckner & Bearman, 2005). A common finding from a variety of scholarly inquiry reveals that there is an overwhelming lack of consistency in how individuals understand purity and abstinence (Breshers, 2007; Bruckner &

Bearman, 2005; Doan & Williams, 2008; Fahs, 2010). For instance, through their in-depth interviews with young girls, Doan and Williams (2008) were not able to derive a single, clear definition of abstinence. Other research supports this lack of clarity by providing two primary concerns with the word “abstinence”: on the one hand, the term is vague and open to multiple definitions, and on the other hand, many educators are placing abstinence-based education over harm reduction education which details the negative consequences of engaging in unprotected sex (see Breshers).

What has been consistently found, however, is that individuals’ definition of abstinence continues to be inconsistent with how the Center for Disease Control defines abstinence (Horan, Phillips, & Hagan, 1998). The CDC (2015) defines abstinence “as refraining from practicing sexual activities that involve vaginal, anal, and oral intercourse” (para. 2). However, a study conducted by Horan et al. (1998) found that college students noted risky sexual behaviors such as “anal intercourse, oral-genital contact, and oral-anal contact, as abstinent behaviors” (p. 61). Other findings continue to indicate a disconnect between how abstinence is defined by abstinence-only education and the actual behaviors of adolescent’s and teens (Sawyer, et al., 2007). This lack of clarity and the gap between prescribed sexual behaviors and the actual reality of young peoples’ sexual behaviors perhaps underlie the continued unexpected rates of STDs and unintended pregnancies (CDC, 2014; Hamilton, et al., 2015; Office of Adolescent Health, 2015; United Nations Statistics Division, 2015; Weinstein, Walsh, & Ward, 2008).

Similar to the CDC, modesty advocates urge girls to refrain from sexual activities by having them “dress and conduct themselves demurely, save their virginity for marriage, and resist promiscuous ‘bad girl’ behavior” (Hahner, 2008, p. 3). For them, modesty goes beyond refraining from sexual behaviors to include behaving and dressing modestly. Modesty advocates

believe that if a woman desires to maintain her sexual integrity she will “need to let go of some of [her] freedoms (in dress, thoughts, speech, and behavior) in order to serve the best interests of others out of love” (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004, p. 29). This argument provides insight into the breadth and complexity of how modesty advocates conceptualize purity and modesty. Although both advocates and abstinence-only education courses uphold abstaining from sex until marriage, this perspective adds additional expectations as to how young girls should think of their purity – it is both physical and emotional. One modesty devotional targeted to young girls contends that

purity is much more than moral behavior. Purity is first and foremost a matter of the heart. To be pure is to be single-minded. It is to have a single goal, a single focus, and a single purpose for ourselves and our lives. That is biblical purity, and from it springs moral behaviors – the good we do with our bodies. At its core, purity is having a heart for the Lord that isn’t watered down or polluted by lesser things...women struggle with little success to master particular sins – outward displays of impurity. (Brownback, 2010, p. 9-10)

Relying heavily on biblical scriptures, modesty advocates provide that a pure woman seeks to live a life of purity to please the desires of Christ since sex is seen as appropriate only within the confines of a heterosexual marriage (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004; Shalit, 1999). Ultimately, a young girl who wishes to be pure will avoid flattery by dressing and behaving modestly, not being concerned about her sexual appeal (but is still attractive), and able to master her passions and sexual desires (Brownback, 2010; Ethridge & Arterburn). Given the evangelical perspective on women’s sexuality and the complexity of enacting various aspects of purity provided by modesty advocates, this study examines how young women who took the purity pledge understand and enact these various aspects of purity.

RQ1: Based on various message sources, how do young women who have made a purity pledge define and enact purity?

Young Women as Sexual Individuals

When it comes to understanding what purity and modesty are and how young girls are expected to enact such behaviors, various intersections of identity, sexuality, and agency come to the foreground. The following section reviews the contrasting viewpoints that exist in how modesty advocates and feminist scholars talk about female sexuality.

Sexuality

From a scholarly standpoint, an individual's identity is based on a range of attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and preferences on a number of aspects (Smith, 2013). Keeping in mind the breadth and influence of the modesty movement, young women's identity is likely bound in varying degrees of religiosity or religious identification (McKenna, Green, & Smith, 2001). As noted earlier, the use of public and private confession became a significant element in how evangelical Christians were able to get more young women to pledge to be pure. Ultimately, when considering one's identity, constructs of sexuality and religiosity both serve as vital aspects of how an individual makes sense of who they are (McKenna, Green, & Smith).

Moreover, previous research posits that many American youth continue to view religion as important in their everyday lives and that those who regularly attend church events are more likely to refrain from sexual behaviors before marriage (Hull, et al., 2011). Religiosity is more likely to act as a predictor for females in delaying sexual intercourse (Rostosky, et al., 2004). Further, religiosity (feeling of religious devotion) often corresponds to negative emotional consequences for both males and females after they engage in sex before marriage (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003; Regnerus, Rostosky, & Comer-Wright, 2003). When considering female

sexuality and purity, religion (Christianity, specifically) continues to play an important role in setting expectations for how young women should behave.

The idea that sexuality is “who you are” is the starting point for how female sexuality has been conceptualized differently from male sexuality. One common understanding of female sexuality differentiates between being sexual and sexually active. For modesty advocates, God created humans as sexual beings (male or female) but being sexually active is only meant to occur within the boundaries of marriage (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004). In this view, female sexuality is bound in women’s innate emotional desire to “cradle, caress, converse with, and care for the object of her affection,” her husband (p. 18). Further, often times the biblical character Ruth is noted as an exemplar of a lady of purity by comparing her pure actions in a society filled with moral decay to the “blatant sexual impurity” seen in our contemporary society (Kendall & Jones, 2005, p. 78). By following Ruth’s example, young girls are able to fulfill God’s desire for them to be submissive and pure (Shalit, 1999). In the end, modesty advocates see female sexuality as the practice of personal restraint in order to glorify God and others through this self-less love (Brownback, 2010).

This review of how modesty advocates perceive female sexuality provides a background for how critical scholars have critiqued this view. In her analysis of this biblical perspective, Valenti (2010) argues that this obsession with virginity and young girls’ need to remain or return to purity is harmful to how they see and understand their sexuality. More specifically, Valenti suggests that the modesty movement discourse implies that a “woman’s worth lies in her ability – or her refusal – to be sexual” (p. 10). In other words, the ongoing discussion surrounding sex and sexuality places a greater value on women’s bodies which makes young girls’ ability to be moral actors partially dependent on their choice to abstain from sexual behaviors.

Since purity has been seen as being more “natural” and innate in women (Kelly, 2000), concepts of virginity have been historically stricter for women (Carpenter, 2011). This perspective has led feminists to argue that women who have “fallen” from virtue face more serious consequences (i.e. no longer being seen as “marriage material”) while men’s lapses in judgment are more forgivable (White, 1993). As previously noted, since the 1960s, beliefs about women engaging in premarital sex became more open but women were still expected to reserve such behavior within the boundaries of love and deep emotional connection (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Although social expectations are constantly being (re)negotiated, feminist scholars argue that there is still a reason as to why girls are more likely to seek “second virginity” (repenting and deciding to stop all sexual activity after engaging in sexual behaviors) (Hayt, 2002) and more often experience negative emotions and regret after having sex (Regnerus, 2007).

Feminist scholars have also pointed out how the larger contemporary culture (particularly popular media outlets) tends to fetishize female youth and virginity (Valenti, 2010). These critics continue that the current social climate is increasingly antagonistic to women’s sexuality (Filipovic, 2013). More specifically, this concern, coupled with the increased focus on the virginity of young girls, is “leading women to damage themselves by internalizing the double standard” of being attractive and sexual in appearance but pure in behavior (p. 13). It is this view that permits the public to be critical about women’s bodies and, therefore, their sexuality (Valenti, 2010). For example, in 2006, Republican South Dakota representative Bill Napoli in an attempt to explain his support for a ban on abortion stated, “A real-life description to me would be a rape victim, brutally raped, savaged. The girl was a virgin. She was religious. She planned on saving her virginity until she was married” (PBS Online News Hour, 2006). This description was the only scenario in which the representative believed an abortion would be warranted. In

this view, a woman worth extending rights to is one who has always been pure and virginal. For these critics, it is this perspective on women's bodies in which a sexually impure (made a choice to engage in premarital sexual behaviors) woman has been historically told that she has nothing to offer and that her body is not really hers: the "ideal" unmarried sexual female is a sexually inactive, modest woman (Filipovic, 2013).

Consequently, when discussed by modesty advocates, the enactment of female sexuality (having sex) is seen as negative to the health and well-being of girls except within the confines of marriage (Freitag, 2011). In regards to marriage, critical scholars provide that this view of female sexuality is embedded in a romanticized narrative in which sex is actually equated to romantic love (Fahs, 2010). Commonly referred to as a "master narrative of romance," this perspective continues to perpetuate the heterosexual beliefs of women being sexually passive – actual sexuality is traded for "male commitment, care, and attention" (Tolman, 2002, p. 81). In the end, regardless of how they critique the modesty movement, the resounding common theme among critics is that a double standard exists between men and women's bodies in the rhetoric emanating from these religious-based messages. Critics argue, "[m]en get passes, women get reputations, and real, lasting humiliation travels only one way" (Bruni, 2013, para. 13).

Sexual Agency

Broadly speaking, desire is best understood as the sexually embodied urges young women may have which are similar to how our culture constructs the sexuality of young men: women also want sex (Lamb, 2010). Subjectivity opens the space for young girls to take ownership of their sexuality. Therefore, sexual subjectivity is conceptualized as "a necessary component of agency and thus of self-esteem. That is, one's sexuality affects her/his ability to act in the world, and feeling like she/he can will things and make them happen" (Martin, 1996, p.

10). In this sense, a young woman with sexual subjectivity would be able to make *active* sexual choices to enjoy sexual pleasure and sexual safety (Tolman, 2002). Tolman continues that women's

sexuality does not develop in a vacuum. [Thinking of sexuality in a vacuum] leaves out the ways in which girls are under systematic pressure not to feel, know, or act on their sexual desire. It covers up both our consistent refusal to offer girls any guidance for acknowledging, negotiating, and integrating their own sexual desire and the consequences of our refusal. (p. 3)

Feminist scholars have examined the ways in which culture has viewed, discussed, and disciplined female bodies and how this discourse has compromised their sexual subjectivity (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Valenti, 2010). Modesty advocates argue that if young women wish to have sexual agency they need to dismiss the “hyper-sexualized” messages propagated through the media and return to their innate chaste behaviors (Shalit, 1999). The following section highlights the different perspectives feminist scholars and modesty advocates have in relation to women's sexual agency.

One primary example of feminists' critique is found in their discussion on the myth of purity. The myth of purity is derived from a historical fear of women's bodies and how male bodies are seen as being symbolically cleaner than the female body, “the vagina is frequently associated with rot and decay” due to women's biological need for menstruation (Kipnis, 2006, p. 112). If women's bodies are already seen as being inherently dirtier than their male counterparts, why attempt to place the pressure of remaining pure on women? The evangelical movement was tactful about how they framed their messages to women. Instead of focusing on purity in the sense that someone is able to be free of “dirt,” modesty advocates desired to keep

women pure in the sense that they wanted women to feel guilt-free by not indulging in sinful behaviors like engaging in premarital sex (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004; Shalit, 1999). This standpoint on purity and female sexuality gives girls agency through their ability to say “no” (Lamb, 2010).

For feminist scholars, this controlling and maintenance of young girls’ sexual desire is problematic because when it “is truncated, all desire is compromised – including girls’ power to love themselves and to know what they really want” (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993, p. 211). It is this view that has led feminists to conclude that women often lack their own sexual desire, pleasure, and agency (Fine, 1988). This lack of agency is concerning for these scholars because it places girls at risk for underdeveloped personalities and psyche and at higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies (Debold, 1996; Tolman, 2002). These critics see sexual agency for women as “the ability to advocate for one’s interest in the sexual arena” (Bay-Cheng, 2003, p. 65). Interestingly enough, it is this same message about sexual agency that serves as the basis for modesty advocates who encourage young women to return to chaste and pure behaviors.

The promise of gaining perceived agency resonates with both the modesty movement and feminist rhetoric. Since both evangelicals and feminists frequently position themselves as counter-publics within American culture, both have utilized rhetoric of victimization and opposition to liberate private concerns and create messages promising more agency within the larger public sphere (Fraser, 1992; Lundberg, 2009). The primary argument the modesty advocates like Shalit (1999) use to attract young women to their movement is a promise that they will have more agency than their sexually active counterparts (Hahner, 2009). Shalit argues that the continued rise of sexual harassment, violence, and sexually transmitted diseases are tied to

the decline of female modesty encouraged by feminist attitudes toward sexuality (Hahner, 2005). Shalit further provides that modest women, those who enact modesty through demeanor and sartorial choices, would not only be more empowered by their sense of self, but would be more resistant to sexual harassment and violence. Following Shalit, fellow advocates point to how the recent trends set by popular icons of the time (i.e. Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan), allow young women to lose a sense of who they truly are to fit with what is popular at the time: overtly sexual individuals. According to these advocates, if young women wanted to take back control over their bodies and gain more “actual” agency, they needed to make a pledge to remain abstinent. In other words, the way to true, sexual liberation is found in making the choice to abstain from any premarital sexual behaviors. By refusing to conform to the social expectations about sex, these purity pledgers obtain power, control, and authority of their bodies by saying, “No.”

The primary concern for modesty advocates is that with their new-found liberation and sexual freedom, young girls no longer have a choice in how they enact their sexuality: performing sexual favors to fit in and dressing in revealing clothing (Shalit, 1999). Other modesty advocates echoed this concern by noting how young girls are now living in an age when they have become more predatory than their male counterparts (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004). These advocates continue that “young women not only track guys down and do the asking out, but they also initiate the physical relationship” which has left boys the victims of brazen female sexuality and no “respectable guy wants to be a girl’s boy toy” (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004, p. 84). Girls have been “suppressing their own desires in order to attract the young man who enjoys the performance of embodied sexuality” (Hahner, 2008, p. 7). Here, modesty advocates make a distinction between sexual power and sexual agency. In regards to the former, this new-found

power has been previously noted as a large source of concern. However, in terms of the latter, modesty advocates understand sexual agency as women's ability and desire to control their sexual urges (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004; Hahner, 2008). By making the decision to remain pure, young girls are able to take back the agency (by conforming to religious expectations) that a "hyper-sexualized" culture has stripped from them.

According to critical and feminist scholars, however, this perspective is yet another source for girls' bodies to be oppressed, commodified, and controlled (Freitag, 2011). Critics argue that this false sense of new-found agency re-inscribes young women's place as being responsible for young men's behaviors (Hahner, 2008). Tolman (2002) articulates the frustration feminist scholars and critics have about concepts of purity with a single question, "What 'choice' do girls have when their own sexual feelings are not supposed to exist?" (p. 203).

To sum, while feminist scholars and modesty advocates have different ideas on how women should enact their agency, they both offer similar messages to give young women the sense that they could have more sexual agency. For the modesty advocates, saying no and delaying sex gives girls more agency by staying guilt free while feminists argue that this perspective limits their agency which then encourages young women to think negatively about their sexuality. In other words, while modesty advocates emphasize their take on agency through discourses highlighting female purity, feminist scholars focus on advocating for the individual woman's interest in the sexual arena by utilizing discourses from second wave feminist beliefs about sexual liberation. Both camps further make the distinction of perceived agency based on societal norms versus self-interest even though they offer different viewpoints on what is currently "wrong" with the way society thinks about female sexuality. Ultimately, however, both modesty advocates and feminist scholars produce discourse that encourages young women to

have control over their own bodies. For the modesty advocates, having sexual agency means returning to their lost pure behaviors after trying to fit in with a “hyper-sexualized” culture. For feminist scholars, having sexual agency means liberating women so that they can personally decide if and when they wish to engage in sexual behaviors.

This tension further inscribes a postmodern “crystallized self” in which young girls have the perceived ability to act against whatever dominant social roles are being continuously re-inscribed by discourse when actual agency may not exist (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Since a “crystallized self” is about an individual’s ability to create multiple facets of their identity rather than enacting dominant discourse, it is these conflicting ideas of sexual agency offered by modesty advocates and feminist scholars that the next research question seeks to examine. Rather than taking a definitive stand on this debate, I examine how young women who took a purity pledge perceive and make sense of their own sexual agency.

RQ2: How do young women who have made a purity pledge interpret sexuality and sexual agency?

Theoretical Background

This study takes a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of young women who participated in a purity pledge. In this last section, I will provide the argument for taking a phenomenological perspective and how this framework upholds a communicative approach to inquiry. In the broadest sense, a phenomenological approach is “the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (Sokolowski, 2002, p. 2). As the researcher, this broad understanding grants me the ability to explore how young women have come to experience purity and their purity pledges

(Gallagher, 2012) and how these narratives lead to a “conscious experience” (Alter & Walter, 2007, p. 3).

As sexuality continues to be an experience often dictated by constructions of purity and modesty for women, it becomes imperative to examine how women make sense of their bodies and their relationship to purity. In other words, to derive “truth” in relation to purity we must begin with the experiences of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Broadly speaking, any human experience is sequential and irreversible (Houghtaling, 2013). However, the always-shifting meaning of an experience, like making a purity pledge, can be remade, reflected upon, and even rewritten (Heinamaa, 2003). Therefore, the body becomes a significant epistemological tool for gathering knowledge of the world and how humans experience particular phenomena (Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996). Since we are entangled in the world, the body is “only the barest raw material of a genuine presence in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). In the end, the body (or extensions of it) is vital to exploring and understanding lived experience “because it is the medium through which one approaches, senses, and absorbs the world” (Houghtaling, 2013, p. 61-62).

Communication theorists (Deetz, 1973; Steward, 1972) have drawn on concepts of phenomenology and suggest that language does more than describe the world but constitutes it and further establishes how we define ourselves. More specifically, sexuality and purity can be understood as communicative phenomenon in that they become what they are “by virtue of complex sets of relationships and practices that precede our existence and *conscious awareness* but of which we are also *active participants*” (Martinez, 2011, p. 2, emphasis added). Therefore, this analysis of the discourses derived from young women’s subjective experiences with purity aims to develop an understanding of a larger human experience, sexuality (Marton, 1988; van Manen, 1990). By exploring how young women talk about their decision to make a pledge to

remain pure, this study hopes to provide a “description of a universal essence” of purity by giving them the space to tell narratives about their experiences tied to their purity pledge (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). More specifically, this description will allow individuals who have not made a purity pledge to grasp a clear understanding of what it is like to make and strive to remain pure (van Manen, 1990) while negotiating their identity within a postmodern world that offers conflicting messages about sex and sexuality (Atkins-Sayre, 2010).

Opening a space for young women to relate their experiences of purity through narration allows them to rely on their natural ability to be storytellers (Fisher, 1984). In her phenomenological analysis of how young female teens talk about their sexuality, Tolman (2002) emphasized the significance of having these young women restate specific narratives in regards to how they have experienced their sexuality. Since phenomenology is interested in unearthing a broader sense of a phenomenon, Tolman argues that

the stories these girls tell must be understood as larger than their individual biographies; taken together...[they are] part of a larger tale, their stories make visible the permeability of any distinction between private experiences and public reality regarding their sexuality. (p. 24)

In the end, through Tolman’s work, we can claim that an individual’s ability to articulate stories can be understood within the theoretical understanding of phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, a communication perspective on phenomenology allows individuals to retell their experiences to derive a common understanding of purity: the singleness of an individual’s experience leads to a broader perception of a complex phenomenon. Therefore, by adopting this communicative approach, phenomenology will be best understood as ways “to identify the

qualitatively different ways in which different people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena” (Richardson, 1999, p. 53).

When it comes to specific experiences tied to concepts like sex, sexuality, and purity, a phenomenological approach opens the possibility for a woman to experience these phenomena from a multitude of message sources: family, peers, school, the media, and religion (Martinez, 2011). As noted earlier, previous approaches to purity and sexuality have often assumed only a few message sources to be the culprit of sexist notions of female sexuality (religious influences on culture, in general) and health-based concerns stemmed from shallow sex-education courses. A communicative approach to phenomenology lets us examine aspects of the lived reality of making a pledge and how young women make sense of their purity pledge through how they talk about that moment and subsequent years (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter 3 - Methods

Qualitative inquiry involves gathering information on experiences, emotions, relationships, and meanings (Weiss, 1994). This particular method crosses various disciplines, subject matter, and fields (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In other words, this approach to deriving data is useful for interpretive practices that are often complex. Expanding on this perspective from an interpretive standpoint, an individual's reality is self-created (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) which allows for an individual to experience multiple realities and multiple selves (Guba, 1990) or what could be better understood as a "crystallized-self" (see Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). This basis further assumes that our reality is constantly being (re)constructed through the contemporary meanings that are socially developed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, knowledge within a qualitative perspective is understood as being constructed through the interactions with others and through our personally lived experiences (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Often times, this methodology is adopted when the research question consists of a phenomenon that cannot be easily observed (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). As an interpretive approach to the world, qualitative research is placed in a position to interpret or make sense of particular phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Adopting this methodology allows the researcher to locate and understand the subjects within the reality in which they are situated. Generally speaking, qualitative research can be understood as

an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities, as well as the social and the physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multi-paradigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod. They are committed to the

naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical political positions. (Nelson, et al., 1992, p. 4)

This study employs qualitative interviews because this method allows the researcher to “elicit the interviewee’s views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 28). Approaching a research question through qualitative interviews positions the researcher to discover an individual’s unique and personal experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). By compiling detailed accounts of the various experiences pertaining to making a purity pledge, interviews provide the ground for gathering rich data to uncover the participants’ intentions, views, feelings, and structures of their lives (Charmaz, 2006). Through the process of an interview, the participant is able to tell the researcher about his or her lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviewing is selected by qualitative researchers when they wish to “understand [people’s] perspectives on a scene, to retrieve their experiences from the past, to gain expert insight on information, to obtain descriptions for events, and then create a record of discourse that can subsequently be analyzed” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 4-5). After detailing my standpoint as the researcher of this project, I will note how I identified qualified participants and how I conducted the interview and explication process.

Researcher Standpoint

This study is in part derived from my own experiences of undergoing a purity pledge as a young teen. Given the phenomenological approach to this project, I believe it is not only significant, but necessary for me to denote my position as a researcher in relation to the topic at hand. Since concerns and discussions surrounding purity and sexuality are often deemed private matters, having individuals disclose their experiences with purity pledge and sexuality may make

them uncomfortable. However, due to my own experiences with making a purity pledge at the age of fourteen, I can offer an empathetic standpoint in relation to the participants' own experiences. My personal feelings attached to this experience were kept from the participants so that I limited the amount of influence I have as a researcher on their responses. Even though I knew three of the participants, none of them were aware of my personal feelings about my experiences tied to my purity pledge. The only times my personal experiences with my pledge were brought up during the interviews were when the participant asked about how I made my pledge or when I would offer informative statements to let the participant know I was familiar with some of the religious-based language they were using. Letting the participants know that I had a personalized knowledge about making a purity pledge permitted me to glimpse at the young women's worldviews and experiences (Guba, 1990).

This connection further placed me in a position of being able to understand the ways in which they talk about their purity pledge without allowing my personal opinions about the topic to influence the focus of each interview (Foss & Foss, 1994). It was my aim to establish an interaction in which the participants were aware of my familiarity with purity pledges without ever revealing the specific struggles I dealt with. By "bracketing" myself out of the study through sharing my experiences with making a purity pledge in the preface, it was my aim to set my personal feelings aside to focus on the feelings and experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In other words, by detailing my experiences in the preface of this project, I made a conscious effort to minimize the impact my own voice and experiences may have during data analysis (Giorgi, 2009). With this concern in mind, following the drafting of the analysis, I engaged in participant verification with four participants to make sure that my analysis truthfully represents the participants' experiences (Creswell, 1994).

Procedures for Data Collection

Participants

Participants were recruited based on their age and having made a purity pledge at some point in their life. This specific age group was selected because emerging adults have been established as an important age group to study as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Chara & Kuennen, 1994). Through the exploration of identity, within religion and sexuality, emerging adults begin to perceive sexuality as more essential to developing their identities while also becoming more accepting of casual sex and feeling less guilt after engaging in sexual behaviors (Arnett, 2000; CDC, 2000; Chara & Kuennen, 1994; Hodge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993). Therefore, the 9 young women I interviewed were between the ages of 18 and 25 with an average age of 22.

In hopes of uncovering a variety of perspectives and experiences tied to purity, participants could have made their purity pledge in a number of fashions: privately, through church, a convention, or with a group of close friends. Only one participant made a purity pledge at a large-scale purity convention. This was the only purity pledge in which the participant clearly expressed strong familial motivation – she would have not gone to the convention on her own. The remaining participants made their most significant purity pledges in a non-formal, private space. For those private pledges, these women noted that following a nightly prayer or bible reading they realized through reflection that living a life of purity was something they wanted. All the purity pledges were made between the ages of 14 and 17 with 15 being the average age. This means that some of the participants had been living a life of purity for as long as 11 years and as short as 2 years. Only two of participants shared that they had engaged in sexual intercourse outside marriage and three of the participants were also married. All participants

identified as heterosexual and white. Of the nine participants, three identified as Mormon, one as agnostic (a Baptist when she made her pledge), one Lutheran, and four as non-denominational Christian. The variances in religious denominations grants a broader phenomenological analysis by taking into consideration a variety of religious-based messages about sex and abstinence.

Recruitment of participants began with me reaching out to young women I knew who might either have experience with making a purity pledge or knew other women who made purity pledges. Since qualitative inquiry can be extensive for participants, it is not uncommon for a researcher to study friends, acquaintances, family members, or colleagues (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). After the initial three interviews, all three participants were willing to recommend friends who would be interested in interviewing. The remaining six participants were found through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a productive tool in recruiting participants from an elusive population or when the subject matter is sensitive (Lindlof, 1995). Finally, restrictions were not placed on whether or not the young women have maintained her purity pledge. It is important to note that I never specifically asked this information. If it arose out of the interview it was organically generated and at the will of the participant.

Procedures

The interview process followed a semi-structured format in which a set of 20 open-ended questions were asked of the participants (Appendix A). The interviews ranged from an hour and two minutes to an hour and forty-three minutes with the average time of an hour and thirty-one minutes. Of the 9 interviews, three were conducted in person while the remaining took place over a phone call. Rooted in thick descriptions, semi-structured interviews gather depth, richness, and detail from subject's first-hand experiences (Geertz, 1973). I chose this interview type because the guide provides "topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to

explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject” (Patton, 1990, p. 127). When engaging in interpretation, this perspective encourages the researcher to frequently analyze various semiotic devices in order to decipher codes of communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Consequently, the use of semi-structured interviews with the goal of gathering a thick description, allowed me to explore and listen for key words, themes, and ideas in make sure the overall subject is covered (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

To obtain such data, I provided the participants with broad, open-ended questions like, “What are your thoughts on how our society talks about sex?” and “Tell me in as much detail as possible about your experience when you made your purity pledge” to prompt a descriptive retelling of their experience. These primary questions allowed for the conversation to get started and led to probing and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Follow-up questions asked the participants to expand on a particular statement or ask for an explanation for omitted data: e.g. “Can you explain more about what you mean?” (Kvale, 2003). Opening a space for the interviews to be flexible aided the participant and researcher to co-create the discourse that arose during the interviewing process (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Following the interviews, the participants were debriefed and asked if they would be interested in taking part of the member checking process. Four of the participants agreed and provided feedback on an early draft of the analysis. All of the participants were assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. If names of other individuals or specific places were stated by the participants, those were also given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in which non-verbal sounds (laughter, sighing, and the like) were added in context of the utterance that they occurred. The interviews yielded 108 pages of typed single-spaced transcription. I also kept handwritten field notes during each interview to

make note of moments of hesitance or strong emotion. These notes yielded 20 handwritten pages.

Data analysis

Following the transcription of the interviews, I employed thematic analysis as a means to analyze the discourse that arose from each interview. Themes can be defined as a limited range of possible interpretations extracted from discourse that can be readily used to conceptualize human interaction and specific experiences (Owen, 1984). By utilizing thematic analysis, I focused on “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Each theme provided offered a possible explanation of the universal essence of purity and subsequently, sexuality (van Manen, 1990). Ultimately, these themes point to what the young women experienced and how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Thematic analysis is often used as a first-cycle coding process because “it helps a researcher to have a keener sense of what is there, in terms of data, and what possibilities lie ahead for interpretation” (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 159). For this coding process, all the interviews were printed and read line-by-line. During the second read-through, major themes and strong emotion or differences in experiences were noted in the margins. This step of coding involved extracting tensions in the interviews to add depth and complexity to the themes. This two-step coding process allowed for reflection and application of bracketing myself out of the interviews. Overall, thematic analysis allowed me to make sense of the data.

To espouse a thick description surrounding concepts of purity, following a thematic analysis, I also employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Racher, 2003). This second-level analysis of the data not only permits utilizing a thematic analysis as a starting point for organizing the data, but presents an analysis of the “what” and “how” of making a purity

pledge which gets to the essence of this phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). By advancing this goal, IPA recognizes that meaning is constructed within the personal and social world of the participants (Smith, 1996). Building on the original phenomenological theorizing of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), this interpretive turn can be found in the hermeneutic work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger's development of IPA is based on the shift to emphasizing description rather than understanding (Racher, 2003).

By advocating for the application of hermeneutics, lived experience as an interpretive process thrives on understanding the phenomenon within the context in which it is experienced (Racher & Robinson, 2003). As noted in the following chapter, this context was grounded in both larger perspectives (like broader societal norms and expectations) and the unique communities of each of the participants. From a psychological perspective, this shift makes the individual a part of a lived reality instead of an ego dualistically separate from the world (Rennie, 1999). Consequently, this methodological framing "typically involves a highly intensive and detailed analysis of the account produced by a comparatively small number of participants" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 103). By approaching this second-level analysis from the interpretive turn in phenomenology, I employed Moustakas's (1994) method of analyzing interview transcriptions to obtain a thick description. Therefore, the analysis will conclude with "a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textual and structural descriptions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). Following Moustakas's (1994) guidelines permit a reader to walk away with the feeling of, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghonne, 1989, p. 46).

Chapter 4 - Analysis

This chapter details the significant themes that emerged from the interviews with nine women who have pledged to be pure. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: 1) living a pure life is situated within multifaceted perspectives on purity, 2) living a life of purity consists of negotiating multiple “selves,” and 3) being pure grants and reinforces a sense of agency. These themes illustrate how young women who have made a purity pledge understand purity and how they make sense of their sexual agency. In addition, my analysis reveals how sexuality and sexual agency are inherently subjective and frequently negotiated within a private space and within romantic relationships. This chapter concludes with a composite description of the various discourses that continue to influence the participants’ understanding of purity and a narrative description of what it is like to live a life of purity.

Purity Defined and Enacted

The project’s first research question examined how female purity pledgers define and enact purity. Based on the interviews, exposure to messages about sex and abstinence from religious teachings, parents, friends/peers, and public education meaningfully influenced how the participants defined and enacted purity. The young women also spoke indirectly about broader influences like mediated messages, but in general these were broad statements about how open our society has become about sex without the reflection ever tying back to their own personal experiences. From a communicative framework, making note of these message sources and how the participants reflect on them expands our understanding of purity and female sexuality. Grounding the various ways the participants reflected on the impact these discourses have on their understanding of purity will lead into a description of how they enact those meanings.

Religious influence

The most basic understanding of purity for the participants stemmed from being raised in a particular religious faith. For example, when 18 year-old non-denominational Christian Paris was asked to detail how she thinks of purity she stated,

that it's something of guarding your heart because in the bible it says that all sin is equal but sinning, sexual sinning against your body and God and so I feel like it's something about protecting your mind, body, and spirit. That is all in this one sin. Keeping your virginity for your husband and to be righteous before God is really important. God will forgive you if you mess up but it's just something you want to keep in the forefront of your mind when you're in a relationship.

Paris's emphasis on sin and the expectations of God from scripture continues to shape how she thinks about purity. For the majority of the other participants (7 out of 9), this strong connection to religious teachings about sin and one's personal relationship with Christ were central to why they decided to make their purity pledge. If they were to continue to be involved with their church and wished to continue building a personal relationship with Christ, keeping these religious expectations at the forefront was vital in maintaining a pure life. This religious influence not only gives the participants a source of spiritual and emotional guidance (through their personal relationships with Christ), but was also the preliminary source for how they define purity.

This reflection on how churches talked about sex and purity was expressed by 6 of the 9 participants. Although the churches may have approached the conversations in different ways at different times, the message was always the same: a Godly woman strives to live a pure life to reflect the physical and spiritual guidelines provided in the gospel. To obtain that purity, one

must be aware of how her thoughts and actions may lead to impurity for herself and others. At the center of these expectations was the command of waiting until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse. However, one participant's experience growing up American Baptist was quite different from the others. When asked how her church talked about sex, 25 year-old agnostic, Babette, responded that her

church talked about sex and it was always the wait until your married. They still want you to do that, of course, but there was always the "if." If you were going to have sex, you know, make sure it's with someone that you're very in love with. You feel, you know, I mean they definitely wanted you to wait, but they always understood that chances were we were gonna [sic] do it.

Focusing on Babette's experience reveals that a religious, primarily Protestant approach to sex and purity was not identical across the interviews. Ultimately, the interviews show that churches and different denominations of Christianity interpret scripture specific to women and their sexuality outside of marriage differently which influences how young women make sense of purity. For Babette, this difference meant that her approach to living a pure life involved engaging in premarital sex as long as there was an emotional connection with the person and that she was emotionally, spiritually, and physically ready. These variances in differences will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Parental influence

More than half (5 out of 9) of the participants shared conversations they had with their parents in relation to sex and abstinence. In reflecting on these interactions, the majority of these conversations were made with the young women's mothers. These conversations with their

mothers centered on expectations of purity and even open talks about dating. 25 year-old Mormon, Sookie, shared,

Well, I feel like I said before, for a long time I was just trying to figure out who I was and, like, in the back of my mind I would think about the teachings of my mom of being, like, "No sex before marriage," but I'll do other things kind of a thing. Um, like, kissing is okay.

By the time Sookie was out of the house and seriously dating, she would often reflect on the advice her mother had given her throughout her younger years. For 23 year-old Mormon, Madeline and her mother, their relationship created a space where Madeline felt more than comfortable speaking to her mother about her relationships and the physical aspects that often come up when dating. While reflecting on this openness with her mother, Madeline joked that sometimes she could not come home from a first date without her mother asking her if she had been kissed. When the participants reflected on their relationships with their mothers in relation to sex and purity, these utterances were always positive. As Madeline further reflected,

I've ultimately just brought everything in from a different area to kind of come up with my own opinion and own belief which my mom really encouraged, but there is a lot of societal pressure here. I mean, I'm sure, you know, that if I were to really analyze it there are some underlying social pressures there, but I really feel like that with the mother that I have that it did feel like an open decision for me. My mom would repeatedly tell me that she didn't want me to be afraid of talking to her if I was ever in that situation so we could talk and figure it out together. Um, so it was really good that way. There was never any fear.

Although this utterance highlights the openness Madeline appreciates from her mother, she is also speaking to broader societal pressures of being raised in Utah and a Mormon majority population – once again emphasizing the significant role religious discourse (and community) has on female purity pledgers. This reflection from Madeline also begins a trend found throughout all the interviews in which different message sources about purity and sex overlap and reinforce each other. This overlap will play a vital role further down in the analysis in relation to perceptions of sexuality and sexual agency. For now, these conversations with their mothers granted the participants a space to ask their mothers for advice or to talk openly about their boyfriends. In other words, for those who reflected back on interactions with their mothers, these moments were always seen as instants when daughters could look to their mothers for support and guidance.

Yet, this same feeling of openness was never articulated about the participants' fathers. In fact, only Paris spoke to having an open conversation with her father after she got kissed for the first time. When the other participants did reflect on how their fathers talked to them about sex and abstinence, these interactions involved either no conversations at all, vague statements about staying a virgin until marriage, or (for two participants) some level of pressure or expectation to engage in premarital sex. In one utterance Babette points to the different experiences she had talking about sex with her parents,

My dad told me to stay a virgin until I was married. My mom and I, when Girl Scouts, um, we did a, like, mother-daughter day where we went the clinic and got a whole sex ed [sic] thing. She and I could always talk about it. She knew shortly after I lost my virginity. She and I were always really open about it. My dad? No. Granted, my dad is a good Southern Baptist [laughs].

Therefore, open conversations about sex, purity, and abstinence that came from parents were far more likely to have come from the young women's mothers.

Peer influence

Since parents were not always a consistent or candid source of messages about sex and purity, four of the young women noted that interactions with close friends and peers often made up for this lack. When it came to these relationships, reflections either focused on seeing these friendships as a place of encouragement and support or as moments where they were asked to defend their decision to remain pure until marriage. In terms of the former, these conversations opened a space for the young women to have an open and judgement-free conversation with women who may even be living a different life. For example, Babette shared,

Oh, I had a friend...she's one of my really religious friends. She stayed abstinent until marriage...So, she had been seeing this other guy and she was telling me that she was feeling uncomfortable for the fact that they were, like, making-out in bed, like, clothes on and all that. She was, like, I feel uncomfortable because I feel like I'm not doing what God wants me to do and I was, like, I came out with her and was, like, Well, just so you know, I did lose my virginity last week to Morrie. I spent a lot of time thinking about it. I basically, she was counseling me and I was counseling her at the same time. Um, so, you know, if you don't think it's what God wants for you then don't do it and be upfront about it with your guy and, like, I don't have that same feeling for me personally.

Even though Babette and her friend had different views on sex and the role it should have outside of marriage, they were willingly to speak openly to each other. However, most the time these conversations with friends centered on the participants surrounding themselves with other young women who think similarly about sex and purity. In these interactions, messages of

understanding and resemblance in lifestyle would either reinforce discourse being heard from religious sources (and occasionally parents) and sometimes these reflections noted that the women would engage in deeper discussions about what purity means for them. In general, these conversations were places of accountability to reinstate the promises made privately between themselves and Christ. When Paris was asked why she enjoyed having friends to rely on she replied, “I have a friend that has a long-distance boyfriend too and she has struggled through keeping her relationship pure as well. Just having that constant support with my friends by them keeping me accountable and that kind of stuff.” In other words, the immediacy of a friend who is experiencing the same thing that Paris is going through opens a dialogue that is more direct than with her parents. It is in these reflections that participants reveal that the commonality between them and their close friends reminds them of the pledges they have made.

In regards to the latter, interactions with friends also became sights of explanation for their pledge or why they were not engaging in sexual behaviors in general. In most of these reflections, the participants noted that they were aware that their friend would not agree with what they had to say, but they knew that they wanted to be honest about their choices. Take for example, a reflection provided by 18 year-old non-denominational Christian, Lane:

I have a couple of friends that I was spending some time when. I have a boyfriend that I have been dating for almost a year and um one of my friends is also dating someone for a similar amount of time and she asking me cause [sic] she didn't understand how I did it. Like, why I am not tempted enough to abandon it? It took me a while to kind of decide how I wanted to say to her because I knew that she wasn't going to agree with me. So, I told her that I believe that you are only supposed to give yourself to one person and, um, that by giving, every time you give yourself to someone, a part of you is taken and given

to them and even once that's still a big deal...It's just, I think it's mostly regret that you are going to feel for the rest of your life and sex is not worth that. So, it's just sweeter to have that one person in the end and be able to give yourself to them completely...She didn't agree because she just wanted to do what she wanted to do but, um, she listened. So, I think it was cool that she wanted to listen to what I had to say.

Those interactions with young women who were already engaging in sex only re-inscribed how the participants thought about purity and their own sexuality. Being witness to the negative effects of premarital sex (complicated relationships and emotional “baggage”) further supported the messages the young women were receiving from religious texts and their parents. In this sense, friends and peers played a significant role in how the participants thought about purity and the ways they wanted to live their own lives.

Sex education influence

The final most common source of messages about sex and abstinence came from public schools and how sex education is taught. It may come as no surprise that all the participants' reflections about sex education classes continued to reinstate how purity is something different than abstinence. The majority of messages recalled from these public education classes emphasized abstinence as a guaranteed way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancies. What the participants took from these messages is a strong understanding that waiting until marriage would strongly benefit their physical health – which is rhetoric non-unique to just abstinence-only education. The interview with Sookie really shines a light on how abstinent-only education influences how these women think about what purity is.

I guess, like, my personal opinion is that, yes, we should be teaching abstinence, but at the same time you have to give them the option of what is available to them if they make that kind of decision.

Having two family members that were both teen parents, Sookie's experiences and personal opinion about how public schools (and religious discourses) emphasize not having sex instead of teaching about safe-sex practices continues to uphold previous research (Bersamin, et al., 2005; Regnerus, 2007). Broadly speaking, abstinence-only education often reinforced the religious messages the young women recalled being exposed to. Even though abstinence-only education emphasizes not having sex for health-based reasons, the participants noted that being exposed to such messages supported the spiritual and emotional benefits of waiting until marriage to have sex. Yet, five of the participants spoke to concerns, like Sookie's, that abstinence-only education is not practical. If public schools want to give their students their best shot, they need to teach comprehensive sex education which includes safe practices. By drawing on both the religious and abstinence-only discourse, these young women were able to pursue physical, emotional, and spiritual purity. Finally, these reflections specific to peer messages and abstinence-only education offer insight into the subtle ways the participants begin to create a narrative that they may have more perceived agency than their sexually active counterparts.

In the end, how young women make sense of and define purity relies heavily on being exposed to a variety of message sources that approach purity and abstinence in different ways. The contact with differing ways of thinking about sex and purity allows these women to pull from all these message sources to come to terms with how they think about purity. Moreover, these messages continue to reinforce the participants' position of purity and this idea that waiting for marriage to have sex is ideal. In other words, defining purity consists of relying on a toolbox

of discourses in which young women select and evaluate how these approaches to sex and purity best apply to their lives and how they make sense of their own sexuality. The final example comes from Madeline, a self-described “nontraditional” from the rest of her religious community:

I'm very analytical and I've been that way since I was a young child and so, my mom didn't mean to scare me, but she told me about the consequences of what could happen if you decide to have sex outside of marriage or before, you know, before you're ready. She's, like, getting pregnant is one thing and she warned me about different kinds of diseases and, um, you know, especially what I think solidified it was after my, uh, my 10th grade, um, health class. I had a very open teacher, he was the baseball coach. He was very open about things. The more that I learned about sex and about consequences and what I wanted, um, and also religiously as well, looking at that aspect of looking at sex as something unique and special with whomever I did marry.

This excerpt from Madeline references three of the four major places all the participants recalled receiving memorable messages about sex and abstinence: mother (parents), health class in high school, and religious-based ideals about the consequences of sex. In one utterance, Madeline is able to speak to how young women are able to conceptualize what purity and abstinence means from a variety of message sources. This overview of the most common message sources spoken to by the participants provides the backdrop of the sometimes complex and different ways purity pledgers enact purity.

Theme 1: Living a pure life is situated within multifaceted perspectives on purity

Defining purity ultimately serves as the basis for how the participants strive to achieve living a pure life. Broadly speaking, all of the participants spoke to how their understanding of

purity changed throughout the years. More specifically, as the young women began maturing and the messages about sex and purity to which they were exposed increased, they realized that living a life of purity goes beyond the boundaries of just not having sex: purity is more than abstaining from sexual intercourse.

When it came to differentiating purity from abstinence, 5 out of the 9 participants offered their own definitions of abstinence to make a point about what they were doing was more than saying no to sexual behaviors. For the participants, abstinence is based in the scientific, physical definition of not having sexual intercourse. Lorelai, a 23 year-old Mormon, specifically stated that abstinence is

an ill-defined word because for society it means not having sex. It's like, no, I'm not having sex because I want to save it for marriage. I had never really heard it as a purity pledge until someone called me and we were talking. That's how she described it and I think it's beautiful because it is a pledge to stay pure for your husband and abstinence is such a harsh kinda [sic] simple one-dimension defined word and really it's, I think it's so much more than that. It should be more of a purity pledge. It is, you know, a promise to God that you will save yourself for marriage.

Lorelai's distinction between definitions of abstinence and purity point to the religious understanding and teachings about sex. As a Mormon, Lorelai was taught that abstinence was expected, but by framing this decision as a purity pledge, she highlights that purity is a promise to her and to God. In other words, all the definitions of purity from the participants noted a deep connection to religious messages about how a Godly woman should conduct herself outside the confines of marriage. This reflection from Lorelai further drives a divide between what makes a purity pledger someone unique from other young women who may be practicing abstinence. The

idea that a purity pledge is a promise to God immediately adds another layer to just “not having sex.” Making that verbal connection of purity to a relationship with God highlights that purity requires more than just saying no to sex outside of marriage.

In regards to defining purity, all 9 participants did begin with the idea that purity means not engaging in particular sexual behaviors besides just sexual intercourse. Although there were variances in which particular sexual behaviors were “off limits” for the participants, all the young women noted that their physical-based definition of purity was an often naïve, but necessary starting point. For example, Rory, a 22 year-old nondenominational Christian, stated,

I had no idea by what I meant by purity. In my bed that day, I was just, “I’m not going to have sex. There will be no sex.” God hates sex and this is, I, and it was interesting because I never thought of it was something that I shouldn’t do because it should be saved for marriage. I did it because God says not to do it and the church says not to do it but not because it was okay to do later in life. It’s just bad to do now.

From Rory’s perspective, her initial understanding of purity emphasized making the decision to not have sex until marriage (or at all). This definition of purity stemmed from how she was taught to think about sex and marriage from a religious standpoint: sex is only meant to be shared between husband and wife within the confinement of a biblical marriage. For all the participants, making a purity pledge began with the promise or vow that they would not engage in sexual intercourse before marriage. Purity begins by saying no to sex. For example, when 25 year-old Lutheran, Patty was asked what purity meant for her, she candidly stated, “Plain and simple, remaining pure means saving sex for marriage.”

A majority of the participants (8 of 9), however, were quick to point out that abstaining from sexual behaviors is not the only way a pure woman is expected to conduct herself.

They expressed that maintaining pure thoughts and intentions was a more complex process of being pure. This realization was grounded in the religious teachings all the participants grew up with in their various churches. When discussing in detail the specific messages she received in church growing up, Lorelai pointed out how the Mormon church emphasizes a variety of “virtues” expected of Mormon women:

Purity meant that it was another virtue. It was faith and divine nature and individuality...You know, being accountable for your actions and having integrity and making good choices and having virtue and saving yourself and being clean and worthy for your husband and for God.

In other words, making that initial decision to abstain led to the realization that engaging in sex was not the only way a woman could feel impure. On the one hand, expanding on purity being more than “no sex” outside of marriage allowed Lorelai to state later on in the interview that one of these virtues taught her not to go out of her way to attract the attention of men. This line of thought echoes the modesty advocate’s desire for young women to dress modestly or, as frankly put by Lorelai, not walking around in “booty shorts.” On the other hand, Lorelai’s reflection on these different types of virtue, leads into the idea that purity is not just physical, but emotional and spiritual. Lorelai’s idea of being “clean” deepens the participants’ understanding of purity by emphasizing the emotional and spiritual ways a woman may feel impure. When Lane was asked about her experiences with understanding purity she revealed that,

purity meant not having lust in a relationship or towards anyone. I think people think purity is just that point once you are no longer a virgin that you are no longer pure and I think that to keep your purity it can't just be that because, um, because that's such, that line is so far into so many other things. So, you've lost your purity and I think, I, of

course, you can't eliminate lust completely. It's a human thing. By trying to keep it, you know, arm's length away, uh, you can kind of focus more on pure thoughts. It's more than...purity is more than just physical things.

Purity is more than abstaining from physical acts of human desire: kissing, touching, and sex.

What Lane's reflection points to is the significant role keeping a pure mind has on how these women wanted to live a pure life. By noting that purity requires a pure mind, these eight young women argued that keeping pure thoughts was a primary way in which they were able to continue abstaining from particular sexual behaviors. Later in the interview, while reflecting on her experience with abstinence-only education, Lane also stated,

Being pure is not just physical it's a mental thing, a way that you live your life. There's so much more, because if all you do is make that rule that you aren't going to engage in any sexual activity that doesn't mean that your mind won't think about it. If it is still something that you are thinking about just because you don't act on it that doesn't really make it less of a sin. I think that maintaining that mental, emotional, and spiritually purity is actually more challenging than the physical stuff. I think that a lot of people don't really think about it...I don't think a lot of people don't think about the fact that...spiritually it's different. It's important and it's harder.

Since temptations are inevitable as sexual beings, policing and protecting one's thoughts and mind from certain images and messages is a more complicated approach to understanding purity. Assuming that purity relies solely on not having sex oversimplifies the internal process most of the participants undergo to maintain the level of purity they desire. As Lane's closing lines also reveal, these young women do situate themselves as being different from women who are just abstinent. Just saying no to sex does not take into consideration the complexity and difficulty of

staying pure emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Ultimately, this idea of purity allowed the participants to distinguish purity as being something different than abstinence.

For all the young women in this study, a purity pledge requires an internal process of stopping impure thoughts before they become too tempting to act on it. Across all the interviews, there was very little variance in how each woman defined purity. Therefore, purity is best understood as a conscious decision to abstain from any sexual behavior or thought that would lead to impurity. This decision requires a continuous need to keep one's mind and heart pure by being mindful of the temptations they allow to stay in their thoughts. This internal process of protecting their minds and hearts points to purity being best understood as existing on a spectrum. Even though all the participant noted that abstinence from sex is expected, the degree of what is considered "pure" (e.g. heavy kissing, intimate touching, or spending alone time together at home) varied after the religious-based belief of sex only occurring between a husband and wife. How each participant defined purity became the basis for how they enacted and lived a life of purity. These variances in how purity is enacted on this spectrum will be explored through the following sub-theme. More specifically, this sub-theme will note how different standards of purity are enacted internally, within romantic relationships, and within the context of marriage.

Enactments of purity in various contexts

The embodiment of purity required the participants to continuously reinforce their individualistic decisions within several contexts. In most cases, purity begins in a religious context, is internalized in private, and then is enacted in relational contexts like romantic relationships. Paris was the only participant who took part in a public purity pledge that was facilitated through a large-scale religious conference like The Silver Ring Thing and True Love

Waits. In reflecting back on that experience, Paris recalls what she remembered learning what was expected of her to live a life of purity,

The only thing they said about sex is that when you're married you are naked in the bed with your spouse. So, that's what I thought sex was and I was, like, "That's really gross, I'm not going to do that." So, I did a purity pledge there.

Internal enactments. For the rest of the participants who made a private decision to live a life of purity, that secluded moment was often reflected on as a decision made because they knew it is what they wanted and also what they believed Jesus wanted from them as religious women. This realization was influenced by religious-based messages that were heard in church or church-based events and then re-enforced by parents and other religious peers. The non-formal, private context of living a life of purity is perhaps the largest context in which purity is most often reinforced. Enacting purity within a private space further reveals how aspects of the therapeutic rhetoric are at play. More specifically, the process of personal "confession" and self-monitoring of impure thoughts. Although interactions with others occur constantly on a day-to-day basis, during those moments, a continuous internal conversation is going on through these young women's minds. Sometimes in these private thoughts, the women are in prayer asking Christ to help keep their thoughts and actions pure. While Paris was further detailing the ways she tries to maintain her purity, she offers a clear insight to the importance of having constant prayer with God,

Every time I wake up in the morning or when I'm about to see my boyfriend, um, I try to be, like, "God protect my thoughts, protect my mind, protect my body. I really want to be pure and I want to protect Doyle and protect myself." So, I try to keep lustful thoughts

out of my head to help both of us to stay pure. So, I don't rely on myself for that stuff, I rely on God because I can't, because my flesh is lustful.

Other times, the participants shared that they kept themselves accountable by reminding themselves about the decision they have made and what they hoped to gain with that choice. Even for one of the participants, Louise, a 21 year-old Baptist, who has never had a romantic relationship, this thought process and internal dialogue with Christ lays the foundation for the way they wish to live their life:

I rely so much on my relationship with Christ for so many things. I mean, Matthew 6:33 says, you know, "Seek first the Kingdom and by this all things to come." So, I really focus on that idea every day, because my committed relationship right now is with Christ...I mean, if you look at scripture there is nothing in there that promises that everyone will end up with someone, but it is promised that we will be loved by Christ. So, I should honor that.

This quote from Louise echoes what other participants have stated when explaining that living a life of purity is for themselves and for Christ/God. For the rest of the participants (like Paris) who have experience dating (7 out of 9), establishing that level of internal communication and reflection with Christ sets a communicative and spiritual standard for their romantic relationships. Finally, perhaps what is most important about this context is that it is constant. This consistent internalizing and personal reminding of the pledge made and future goals ultimately shapes how purity is enacted in the other contexts.

Physical enactments. The physical enactment of purity begins when the young women enter into romantic relationships. All but two of the participants are currently in a relationship or have experience with dating and communicating boundaries with boyfriends. For those who are

currently dating, being open and constantly communicating about what sexual behaviors are permitted was extremely important and key to maintaining their purity pledge. This specific context's most prominent reflections focused on how each young woman communicated physical expectations (boundaries) and having conversations when heated intimate moments lead to tempting thoughts to push things further (upholding boundaries) were vital to keeping their pledge. For Paris, having a discussion with her boyfriend early on about their boundaries is the first physical space purity is enacted. Establishing those physical boundaries early in each relationship was the first step:

Actually, the first conversation we had when we got in the relationship was what our boundaries are and where do we stop. Um, my boundary was just kissing, like, that is all I wanted to do and how far I wanted to go and his boundary was no form of sex, like oral or normal sex. So, he was like, I'm not going to push you on yours and that's where we set the boundaries because mine was further up than his.

This perceived level of respect for each of the participant's wishes to remain pure until marriage was more common than reflections about romantic interests that were not as respectful. This respect for each other's boundaries often resulted in most of the participants (7 out of the 9) talking about how boundary conversations occur frequently especially when physical moments got heated. When Lane was asked about these discussions, she stated that she and her boyfriend would revisit their boundaries,

If either of us feel like there's a little bit of tension or something like that. We just talk about it and remind ourselves that we set these things and that we need to keep our word to ourselves and to each other.

In some ways, maintaining the purity pledge was less complicated when the other person in the relationship was holding themselves to the same level of expectations as the young women. In other words, conversations were easier between couples when both partners were invested in living an abstinent life or respecting the boundaries of the participants.

When less respectful interactions did occur with romantic interests, one of two things happened: the women took a definitive stance on their choice and rejected the man or gave into the moment and went beyond their boundaries. The former was most common (6 out of the 9) among the young women who reflected on past relational experiences. One prime example came from Sookie. While in high school, Sookie was invited over to a guy's house to hangout. On her drive over, she decided to call him to ask where she should park her car, because she did not want to block anyone else in.

He then told me that his dad wasn't home. I'm like what? I'm, like, okay, like, it was really weird and he's, like, but you know you can park your car next to mine so, like, if we, we could have sex in the car or have sex in the house if that's more comfortable. I, like, I was like I was in shock! That is not what this is! And he asked me like what did you think you were coming over here for? I was like okay, first of all have the respect to ask me out on a date and then like try something don't just call me over here, like, some house call. I told him he was disgusting! [laughs].

Although an extreme example, what Sookie's experience and reaction point to is when moments like these did occur, that rejection became a source of pride for these young women. In these moments with romantic interests, they were able to stand firm in their decision to remain pure until marriage and respect their boundaries. These instants allowed them to situate themselves as being different from other girls who may have said "yes" in those moments. Through the

examples highlighted by Paris and Sookie, the enactment of purity beings with setting clear boundaries on what sexual behaviors are allowed in a romantic relationship and then holding oneself accountable to those expectations.

Within the context of marriage. Being able to speak with three married women (all Mormon) revealed that living a life of purity does not stop after the “I dos.” Supporting the other participants’ definition of purity as something more than just not having sex, these married women spoke to what it is like to continue living a pure life within the contexts of marriage. For one participant, Sookie, her mother encouraging her to date men that she could see herself marrying helped solidify how she could live a pure life both inside and outside of marriage. As a Mormon, that meant understanding that dating and marrying someone of her own faith would assure commonality in their beliefs. This way of thinking about relationships was specific to the Mormon participants. Although some did date men outside their religious ideology, it was always “assumed” that they would marry a Mormon man. This assumption was not based in societal pressure, but rather an individual decision that each woman knew she wanted to marry a man who shared her same views for the sake of their relationship and future children. Therefore, all three Mormon participants married men of their same faith.

Across these three interviews, living a pure life within marriage means remaining faithful to their spouses on a physical, emotional, and mental level. On the physical level, not engaging in adultery was one of the first things articulated, but as Lorelai put it, that physical aspect goes farther than saving sex for her husband:

I think being pure and holding yourself as that modest person and not, just because I'm married doesn't mean I get to go out in low-cut tank tops and booty shorts and let all these other men look at me. No, I still save that for my husband.

Continuing to dress modestly also assisted in keeping the couple accountable by not flirting with others and abstaining from watching porn. Any other physical act that may lead to corrupting their emotional or mental purity was also off-limits for both partners in the marriage. The primary way these three women continue to live this pure life in their marriage is through establishing a precedent in which communication is open and honest. This openness in communication not only focuses on the sexual aspects of their relationships, but as stated by Madeline this openness in communication helps keep her and her husband truthful with each other. By keeping each other on the “straight and narrow,” Madeline and her husband are able to continue to grow each other’s spiritual purity. More specifically, by continuing to build a personal relationship with Christ, Lorelai felt that by keeping her and her husband’s relationship with Christ a priority in their marriage ensured that she is continuing to live a pure life in her marriage.

To sum, these examples revealed how keeping one’s heart and thoughts pure set a precedent for how the participants enacted their purity in both private and relational contexts. Ultimately, grounding purity in the ways young women actually understand and enact it provides a basis for how they perceive their sexuality and sexual agency.

Identity and Sexual Agency

Theme 2: Living a life of purity consists of negotiating multiple “selves”

This project’s second research question was interested in uncovering the various ways female purity pledgers reflect on their sexuality and sense of sexual agency. The idea of becoming more independent through living a life of purity was a resilient theme brought out during the majority of the interviews. Broadly speaking, all participants spoke to how living a life of purity was chosen because it was who they were and who they wanted to be. Regardless

of how they were raised or if the choice was made to push back against a “hyper-sexualized” culture, this strong sense of independence reinforced their identity and their sexuality. For Paris, this meant that,

It was more me becoming, because I had made it before, so, it was me being, like, “I’m making this for myself. I’m doing this because I want to make it for myself.” I didn’t want anyone else telling me what to do so it was me becoming independent.

Since Paris was the only participant to attend a purity convention, this shift from making a purity pledge for just God (or her family) to making these decisions for herself becomes an important transition in relation to perceived agency. Paris was twelve years old when her parents took her to the purity convention. This realization of independence occurred when she was a junior in high school – almost five years later. For Paris, as her relationship with Christ grew stronger as she matured as a young adult, she realized that if she was to live a life of purity she needed to take on that responsibility and accountability herself (with the help of Christ).

In other words, agency is integral and vital to how all these women think about their purity and their sexuality. Although all participants strongly believe that their religious background was an important influence in their decision, their reflections never make it evident that they were forced or pressured into espousing this way thinking about their bodies and self-worth. If one was to inform the participants that they had little say in how they think about their sexuality and sexual freedom, they would correct you by stating that the purity mindset was one they adopted because it was true to who they were and who they wanted to be in the future. This perceived sexual agency was clearly expressed by Sookie:

It’s [purity] about, you know, it’s about your thoughts about yourself, it’s about how you respect yourself and feeling like but linking your self-worth to your virginity. So,

virginity is more than just making that promise not to have sex until marriage, but recognizing that, you know, like my own self-worth and my own value.

As the continuous negotiation occurred throughout the years and defining purity became as complex and significant as enacting it, these women have been able to (and continue) to see the significant and often positive impact a purity pledge has had on their life. This positive influence is aligned with a question Madeline frequently asks herself, “Am I respecting me, am I doing things that I would be proud of?” Further, when 25 year-old Lutheran, Patty, was asked how making a decision to live a pure life until marriage continues to influence her, she stated, “I think this decision shapes who I am as a person.” In the end, these single-thought utterances really get to the core of what it means to make a purity pledge for the participants who kept or did not keep that vow.

For those who have engaged in sexual behaviors beyond the boundaries of kissing, they still reflect back on the decisions they had made as choices they made at some point living a pure life was what they desired. For Rory, after engaging in sex for the first time, she went online and bought herself a purity ring to serve as reminder of what she had intended to do when she first made her purity pledge,

I used my purity ring as a strategy to move back towards that [purity] I suppose. I'm proving it to myself that I'm not a bad person. I was so not happy with myself. I felt like the only way to navigate that and those feels of deep self-depreciation was making this statement that, “Hey, I'm not as bad of a person as I think I am.”

The guilt that Rory struggled with (and continues to struggle with) will be expanded further under the next theme. However, in this moment, Rory was able to reject that decision she made to engage in premarital sex to re-enforce what she believed God wanted and, consequently, what

she wanted for herself: living a life of purity. Rory's experience continues to note the consistent connection between these participants' personal relationships with God and how that help shapes the ways they perceive themselves and their purity.

Within the context of marriage

Even within marriage, this theme of self-worth and empowerment continues to define these young women's sexuality and sexual agency. For Madeline, reminding herself of her value and self-worth and having a husband that reinforced those same standards let her know that she was in a marriage that would permit her to continue that pure life she had been cultivating for years. Since there was a strong sense of the "two shall become one" in these articulations, the participants made it clear that they would not have married someone that made them lose sight of who they were and what they wanted out of life. When asked if women should make a purity pledge for the sake of their future husband Lorelai responded,

That's a problem. Just because you don't know who you are going to fall in love with and if you fall in love with a man who has become sexually active before you got married and then that's something that's gonna make you decide not to be with him for that one reason. That's not Christ-like. That's, you know, what you're taking your purity pledge for in the first place. You, you know you need to be open and forgiving and understanding but also, you know, have your own reason and have your own, um, requirements.

Looking at how purity is enacted in romantic relationships and within the confines of marriage reveals that perceptions of individuality and independence is important in how these young women think about their identity and sense of agency in relation to others. Overall, when it comes to romantic relationships, finding a partner that supports and lives a similar life to these young women grants them the space to enact the pure life they desire. Whether in marriage, a

dating relationship, or even single, perceptions of sexual agency all focused on their decision to remain pure as the right choice because it is who they are.

Theme 3: Living a life of purity grants and reinforces a sense of agency

Six young women expressed one of two specific views on sexuality which revolved around understanding it as being on “hold” until they were married or that they were most certainly sexual beings with all the agency available to them. More specifically, some of these women argued that they were not all that different from their peers who were engaging in premarital sex. For example, Lane explained,

I am not different than anybody else my age. I still have the same thoughts and hormones, of course, because it's a human thing and it's something that God put in us and I don't think that in itself is wrong at all. I think that I'm no different, I'm just waiting. So that doesn't mean that all that sexual desire or that I have no sexuality it's just kinda [sic] hanging out until one day when I'm married to use that.

What does separate these women from others is their conscious, every day decision not to act on those desires while constantly monitoring their thoughts. Although a number of participants spoke to how difficult those temptations to go beyond their boundaries were, they would pull themselves out of that passionate moment to reflect back internally on the vows they had made. However, some the participants did see themselves as being and living a different life than the majority of those peers. For this group of young women, they spoke to concerns about how “casual” sex has become within the dating process. Three participants specifically spoke to how after a while sex is just expected after a certain age. For example, every time Patty visits her doctor, “They assume I am sexually active just due to my age. Many people think it is ‘weird’ that some want to wait until marriage.”

This perception that waiting until marriage to engage in particular sexual behaviors was a common line through the majority of the interviews. With these six women in particular, they are witnessing a culture that is shifting away from a once conservative framework in which sex was once something kept entirely within the private sphere. Echoing the rhetoric of the modesty advocates, these participants articulated that they may have more perceived agency than their fellow peers who are feeling more pressured to just have sex, because it is what young adults are “supposed” to do. In light of this, for six of the purity pledgers, their perceived agency is grounded through the act of saying “no.” Like Patty, these women see their sexuality as something oppositional to how the larger public portrays female sexuality,

I think sex has become almost a highlight in our society. Not only is it normalized in some advertisements, books and movies, but it has almost become expected of young people in relationships.

These participants perceived that by setting boundaries on what they would not do outside of marriage set them in a position to have more agency than friends and peers who gave into the societal “norm.”

From this perspective, society has become too open and constrictive on how it talks about female sexuality: a mature woman should always be ready to have sex. More specifically, the contemporary, society-based defining of sex sets the limits on some of these young women’s ability to say “no” to sex without being judged. When Paris was asked how she felt about the way society talks about sex, she explained,

I think that society has, like, they are talking about it too much and in the wrong way. I feel like they are talking about it like it's okay to have before marriage. Um, and they advertise it to everyone because sex sells these days. Um, but the church isn't talking

about it enough so it is confusing a lot of people and it's making it a lot harder for younger people to stay pure until their married.

In this reflection, Paris continues to point to how the participants understand their society as one that expects them to have sex outside of marriage. These interviews reveal that by positioning themselves as oppositional to a “hyper-sexualized” society purity pledgers feels that they are empowered through the various discourses that encourage them to wait until marriage to have sex. While identifying with religious-based messages about purity and abstinence outside of marriage, these purity pledgers feel that they are more empowered than their sexually active counterparts. It is this sense of empowerment that gives them their sense of agency.

Paris’s utterance also reveals that not all the participants were entirely accepting of this social construction of their religious reality. In other words, not all the participants had entirely positive things to say about how the church specifically talks about women and their sexuality. In fact, one participant, Rory, spoke quite passionately about how restricting the Church is of how it thinks and talks about women. When it came to critiques of the purity mindset itself, Rory argued,

I wonder if the idea of purity has less to do with the actual sexual act and with the thought that sex is a way to corrupt all the pure things a woman is supposed to stand for. Like, you could be a good person and the idea of being a good person and having sex is something the church believes in. It's like this one-drop rule: You cannot be a pure woman despite everything else. You could be Mother Teresa, but if she had sex there is no way they would be going through the canonization process right now, but, there's no way that would be happening.

The perspective Rory offers points to how criticism is open for both the “hyper-sexualized” culture and “outdated” ways of thinking perpetuated by the Church. More boldly, perhaps, Rory’s remarks hint at concerns of the church limiting purity pledger’s agency when they do engage in sex outside of marriage. This perspective continues to underline the importance of a purity pledger’s agency being bound in being oppositional to a sexualized society. Like Rory, other differences of opinions and experiences did arise out of the interviews when it came to agency. More importantly, these critiques of the church failing to have open conversations about sex note the nuanced way the participants rely on various discourses to make sense of their identity, sexual agency, and sexuality. This position was clearly spoken to by Lane,

All they [the church] do say is that it's wrong and not to do it. They don't tell you that it's okay to be tempted or that it's okay that it comes up and they don't tell you how to deal with it. They just expect you to have enough will power to not do it and, um, a lot of people don't have that much will power and almost in a way I don't know how you could blame them for, um, for not being able to, uh, stay pure through that time through their life. It's a time, it's when you're going through a lot of different changes, your hormones are going crazy and all you know is that it's wrong. They don't tell you that it's normal and natural to feel certain things.

Although all but one of the participants continue to strongly identify with a religious upbringing, these critiques of the church coupled with a pride in being counter-cultural gives purity pledgers their sense of agency. This pulling from various discourses to create multiple facets of their identity empowers the participants to feel like they are making their own individualized choices. For example, in the words of Madeline, “I've ultimately just brought everything in from a different area to kind of come up with my own opinion and own belief.” These reflections by the

participants illustrate the unique ways purity pledgers situate themselves with a religious perspective while simultaneously adopting feminist ideals of individualized agency and self-interest. From the purity pledgers' perspective this sense of agency is a means to an end: living a godly life while converging with feminist ideas of liberating women to give them the freedom to make their own choices about their bodies and sexuality.

This theme of saying "no" also brought to light reflections by three participants who struggled with some form of guilt after failing to say "no." For Paris, this moment was brief after realizing that since physical touch is a strong love language for her, that abstaining from kissing was just not practical and not what she really wanted. After being kissed for the first time, she felt guilt, but after reflecting on the Word and speaking to a friend she realized that boundary was unrealistic. While dating a man of a different faith, Madeline also went past her boundaries. After that moment, she knew that she did not want that to happen again because it felt wrong. However, the process of self-repentance was not enough for her to feel like she had been absolved of guilt. It took speaking openly with her bishop for Madeline to feel like she (and Christ) could forgive herself. With these first two instances, guilt was temporary and never came up again in reflections with more recent romantic interactions. However, one participant's experiences have left her with years of guilt. Reflecting back on the relationship in which she lost her virginity, Rory remembers,

He was unrelenting in the pressure and it was easy for me to say no because I was 15 and everything was fine. Um, we, it was an on-again, off-again relationship. One of those stupid relationships and one of the times we broke up he kinda [sic] threw it in my face with a, "Well, you wouldn't have sex" type of a thing. That's about as negative as it can get. The other guys I have dated have been, like, it's how close can they get in bed before

you try and stop me or are you going to stop? It's hard! When you feel like that once you tell someone that is your limit that they wouldn't try to push past that, but I found that a lot of people don't take it seriously or they don't think I take it seriously or maybe they forgot or that I forgot. Something like that.

After having sex the first time, Rory made a stronger, more decisive decision to repent and live a life of second virginity to help mitigate the guilt she felt. Trying to live a life of purity after did not become any easier. In fact, Rory has concerns that her years of “conditioning” herself to think of sex as a bad thing has left her fearful that she may never enjoy sex even within the context of marriage. As Rory further expressed,

My purity pledge still influences me so much today because I made that promise to myself. So, inherently, it has made it to where I can't have sex today without feeling guilty. So, I just don't enjoy sex because I feel that guilt and I know it's stupid and ridiculous...many people don't understand that. If I can't have sex now without feeling immense amounts of guilt, how am I ever going to do that with my husband? It's classic conditioning...So, a part of me wonders if I am ever going to enjoy sex. I mean, I don't feel my decision not to have sex should define me as a human being, but I feel like...it's so centered on that.

Although she is still active in dating, these fears and concerns are always at the forefront of her mind. Both Madeline's and Rory's experiences further complicate agency with a social constructionist framework. From the interviews, it appears that some perceived idea of agency is bound in one's ability to exert power; for purity pledgers having the power to go against what society expects to conform to religious beliefs/expectations. With Rory's experiences specifically, when a purity pledger fails to uphold her purity pledge, that agency (or sense of

power) weakens or completely vanishes. This being stripped of power may be why Rory so strongly attempted to return to a life of purity after having sex. In the end, when it came to dating, temptation was always there encouraging these young women to break their pledge and give into sexual pleasure. However, for the majority of the participants, staying faithful to their purity pledge took precedent within romantic relationships, because it was “what they wanted.”

Therefore, living a life of purity in romantic relationships means communicating openly and often with boyfriends, fiancés, and husbands. It is this involvement with romantic relationships that the participants’ were able to express and makes sense of their sexuality and sexual agency. To sum, being deeply rooted in articulations of identity, sexuality for a “pure” woman relies on how they think of themselves by conforming to religious ideals of female purity and sexuality. Finally, these perceptions of identity and sexuality ultimately set a stage for how they are able to enact their sexuality.

Composite Description

In reflecting back on the textual and structural aspects of making a purity pledge, several points of revelation call for a deeper analysis. Most importantly, the two primary contexts in which purity are enacted is not a linear process. Instead, the interviews reveal that once the young women were exposed to religious-based messages about sex and realized living that life of purity was integral to how they thought about their identity, their interactions with romantic interests often left them returning to where they began. The internal, private context is the most dynamic space in which purity is enacted and subsequently reinforced. Although most of the participants noted that they would often return to scriptures to remind themselves of guidelines and expectations, these messages were compared to other message sources to derive at what works best for the individual woman. Consequently, living a life of purity relies on a constant re-

evaluative process of learning, adapting, and employing within romantic relationships. This process of living a life of purity is heavily influenced by a variety of message sources.

When it came to defining purity, the commonality is almost uncanny. Despite the variances of memorable message sources about sex and purity, all participants had a strong, central understanding of what purity is. On the other hand, enacting purity provides more space for difference because not all of the participants have the same boundaries, similar relationship experiences, and not all maintained their purity pledge. These tensions and variances in personal opinion and experience point to how individualistic enacting a purity pledge is. The strong sense of commonality in how purity is defined and enacted still leaves room for these young women to negotiate how they fit within those contexts: both religious and societal. Just as purity may mean not ever kissing for some or never going beyond kissing, differences in how the participants thought about how culture and their religion continue to offer similar hopes, like providing agency, while critiquing the other side for being too restrictive in what it expects of young women. For most (8 out of 9), our culture has become too accepting, open, and casual about how it approaches and commodifies sex and sexuality. For the select few (4 out of 9), the church fails to keep up with society by not opening a space for young women to talk about their sexuality within a religious framework. Regardless of what camp the participants positioned themselves during the interviews, no matter what critiques they offered of various messages and discourses about sex and purity, what remained constant for all is how they position their identity at the center of all this competing rhetoric

To conclude, making the decision to pledge purity until marriage as well as the choice to negotiate those ideas to where sex may be seen as acceptable within certain types of relationships continues to shape how each woman in this study thinks about her identity. For all the young

women, their experiences with enacting and struggling with the temptations that are inherent with such a vow speak to the type of woman they are and where they see themselves going. For the majority of the participants, that future woman will be a woman who lies in bed on her wedding night with her husband – the only man to know her in that intimate way. For Babette, a young woman who decided that her purity was not contingent on her virginity, but whether she was physically and emotionally ready to take that step is able to enjoy a happy sexual life with her husband. That same level of sexual fulfillment and enjoyment was also expressed by the three married women who waited until their wedding nights to have sex for the first time. Those who are still in dating relationships continue to participate the circular process of enacting purity: learning, adapting, and employing.

For most, their reason for making a purity pledge was situated in the middle of various discourses which encouraged them to think differently about their sexuality and their identity. Although some of these messages may not have had much of an impact, for those that stuck, the common thread for why they stuck is because the content of those messages registered with how these women think about their value to themselves, others, and Christ. Subsequently, a purity pledge for most was not a decision made just for the women themselves. Instead, the everyday lived experience reveals how the choices they make impact their friends, boyfriends, and husbands. Even though living a life of purity is not just for the women themselves, for the majority of the participants, they could only wait for the same moment uttered so tenderly by one of the married participants, Lorelai,

For Jackson and I, um, I did wonder if it would feel wrong, but in the moment I knew it wouldn't...So, like, the idea of, like, sex was something that I was really excited for. I now get to share that, you know, that piece of that I've held on to for someone this special

and I get to share that with him and he gets to share that with me. It was one thing where we just, I don't know, I felt so, so complete...So, on our wedding night, that was, it was just awesome. Not just the pleasure of sex but more of that intimate connection that you get to finally feel and everything is just complete. It's such a wonderful moment to share and sex for the first time, can be a little bit awkward like you have to take it as, like, laugh about it together and laugh about it!

Even if the end goal of making a purity pledge may not be entirely just for the individual woman herself, she did not passively accept this position on female sexuality and agency if it does not feel true to who she thinks she is. Regardless of variations in personal experiences and understandings of purity, sexuality, and sexual agency, living a life with a purity pledge involves making strategic choices in how a young woman conducts herself privately and among others. The following chapter will discuss noteworthy theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The previous chapter revealed various ways that young women who have made a purity pledge negotiate and express their identity, sexuality, and sexual agency. This chapter will detail theoretical and practical implications of this research. For theoretical implications, I argue that a “crystallized self” is at play for young women who make a purity pledge and discuss how religious and other sources of messages about sex, purity, and abstinence influence their identity, sexual agency, and sexuality. For practical implications, I suggest ways to improve communication about purity at an organizational, familial, and personal level.

Theoretical Implications

Purity and a “crystallized self”

Turning back to the introductory chapter, the intersection of identity, sexuality, and sexual agency for these young women is best understood within the framework of the “crystallized self” (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). A “crystallized self” is the product of various discourses that often “favor some interests over others and thus constrain alternative truths and subject positions” (p. 171). This temporarily “fixed” identity does not imply that an individual is stripped of agency, but rather that “she is a thinking feeling subject, and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash of contradictory subject positions” (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). Given the historical influence of religious-based messages about sexuality and sexual agency in general (Moslener, 2015), the findings of this study underscore previous research indicating that sex is more clearly addressed by religious message sources than most topics (Regnerus, 2007).

In light of this, religious commentary on sex can be understood as both plentiful and open to interpretation (Regnerus et al., 2003). This perceived influence that religion had (and

continues to have) was clearly spoken to by the majority of the participants, but the analysis also noted that other discourse from parents, peers, and sex education classes also shape the ways the women articulated a sense of their identity and sexual agency. However, as noted in chapter two, these discourses constitute two unique perceptions on women and their sexuality. On the one hand, evangelical, Protestant beliefs about premarital sex and the familial unit are one ideological framing the participants are situated in. While on the other, broader social trends that encourage more “accepting” views on cohabitation and engaging in premarital sex. As noted throughout the analysis, these stances are not inherently black and white, but are best understood as a spectrum in which the participants may vary in their opinions and subject positions. The following discussion will expand on how the idea of a “crystallized self” offers an important take on the ways female identity, sexuality, and sexual agency were expressed in this study.

Scholars continue to note the influence evangelical, Protestant discourses have in relation to women and their sexuality and sexual agency (Molsener, 2015). The majority of the participants expressed their agency similarly to how the modesty advocates defined and understand sexual agency: these young women had more perceived agency than their counterparts by saying no to sex and taking an oppositional stance to a “hyper-sexualized culture” (Hahner, 2008). This finding makes sense when taking into account the breadth of evangelical, Protestant messages about sex during the turn of the 21st century (Regnerus, 2007). This perspective becomes complicated when taking into consideration more recent claims by evangelicals that their ideological influence is being pushed out of the larger public sphere (Duerringer, 2013; Lundberg, 2009). More specifically, since their way of life and ideological-influence is being pushed outside mainstream government and mediated-discourse, evangelicals argue that they have lost ideological influence which has led to a moral decay of the American

public (Lundberg, 2009). Therefore, modern-day evangelical discourse positions themselves as being oppositional to the larger public sphere (Duerringer, 2013).

Although this previous research emphasizes the strictly evangelical Protestant perspective, the Mormon participants in this study positioned themselves as oppositional to the larger public sphere as well. On the one hand, they too see their religious ideologies as being different, but on the other hand, they also spoke to how their state of residency, Utah, is also different than the rest of the United States. For example, when Sookie was asked, “What are your thoughts on how our society talks about sex?,” she began her response with, “Well, first I am going to start off with how Utah talks about sex.” Since Sookie perceived that Utah is a centralized area for Mormons, she made a point to detail how the state of Utah talks about sex differently than the rest of the U.S. Similar to evangelical Protestants’ current rhetoric of their values being pushed out of the public sphere, these interviews produced a similar perception from the Mormon participants. In the end, for the seven participants who have maintained a “pure” life, their purity pledge does position them differently than women who may have engaged in sexual behaviors due to societal expectations of having sex before marriage.

It is important to note that in these reflections it seems that the participants were not negatively judging their peers, but illustrating how those decisions to have premarital sex were not in line with how they think about female sexuality. In fact, while talking about their peers, these participants often articulated concern and sympathy, because they felt these sexually active women had to deal with one of the negative repercussions of pre-marital sex: regret. As spoken to in the previous chapter, watching their sexually active peers have to deal with the “drama” that follows pre-marital sex only emphasized that living a life of purity was a personal choice they made. Being surrounded by peers engaging in sexual behaviors outside of marriage makes it

seem less likely that religion alone can influence these young women's sexual behaviors. Therefore, an oppositional stance to a "hyper-sexualized" society and a clear understanding that they did not want to deal with any of the negative consequences of pre-marital sex had a clear, perceived impact on the participants' sense of who they were (and who they wished not to be) and how that set limits on their sexual agency.

Through her ethnographic and qualitative work, Gardner (2011) found that testimonies and expectations provided to religious youth "may be perceived as too didactic, prompting a backlash that suggests that teens do not want to be told what to do; *they want to experience life and decide for themselves*" (p. 97, emphasis added). First, Gardner's finding is supported by how each young woman in this study made it clear that they have made the decisions in relation to their sexuality because it was ultimately what they wanted. Second, this is problematic because even though most participants were critical about how little their church is involved with having discussions about sex, the Christian ideology has very specific expectations of what female believers should/should not do (see Brownback, 2010; Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004; Shalit, 1999). But even the structural framing of being raised in a particular faith does not mean that young women are incapable of having the ability to enact their own choices. This same line of thought is applicable to modesty advocates who claim that a "hyper-sexualized" society has stripped young women of their right to "choose" when they engage in sex (Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004).

This tension gets to the center of a "crystallized self." Without determining whether the modesty advocates or feminists are right when it comes to a woman's "choice" to decide, a "fractured self" understands that an individual's identity is the product of ideological resistance and dominance (Mumby, 1997). For most of the participants in this study (7 of the 9), their

dominant ideological belief is in line with the modesty advocates' resistive rhetoric about a "hyper-sexualized" culture; while two of the participants spoke to how they often find themselves resisting modesty advocates' perspective on female sexuality and sexual agency. Given that identification with various discourses is to some degree subjective, we cannot ignore the ways religious-based ideals about women and sex do influence the ways that the participants articulate their sense of identity and agency (Weedon, 1997).

Wimberley (1989) argues that private religiosity is capable of directly shaping to what degree someone adheres to normative religious ideologies. Consequently, when it comes to sex (where religious applicability may be high), it is possible that women who have made a purity pledge do strongly identify with that ideological framing. Yet, as the analysis noted, religious-based messages were not the only communicative resources that each young woman reflected on when deciding how to live their life on a daily basis. I argue that by fitting within the idea of a "crystallized self," these young women utilize their religious upbringing as the means rather than the only motivator (or ideological framing) to live a life of purity. This hypothesis, known as the religious-strategy explanation, allows for a multitude of reasons and sources (subject positions) to influence young women's sexual behaviors (Regnerus, 2007). The religious-strategy hypothesis

implies that observed outcomes in adolescents' lives do not directly result from the influence of religion. Rather, they are the result of a larger, preceding life orientation to avoid trouble, to attain personal goals (graduate, be admitted to a good college, etc.), and to be as happy and self-fulfilled as possible. (p. 52)

It seems impossible to definitively state whether or not religion on its own can influence the sexual behaviors of young women. However, what can be stated is that religion does play a

significant role in how the young women in this study perceive and attempt to make sense of their identity and agency. Ultimately, this implication provides good reason to find more of a middle-ground in the modesty advocates' rhetoric and subsequent feminist-based critiques of such messages. By situating identity and agency within the theory of a "crystallized self," female purity pledgers are capable of inventing a personalized take on the disagreeing views offered by modesty advocates and feminist scholars. Subsequently, this take on identity and agency may shed light on the complexity of female sexuality in that perceptions of these phenomenon do vary person to person.

Sexuality and a "crystallized self"

Feminist scholars still maintain that religious-based messages and beliefs about female sexuality are damaging to how young women enact their sexual agency (Valenti, 2010). To conclude that the young women in this study have no active sexuality would be an untrue statement to make. As the phenomenological analysis revealed, some of the participants wanted to make it clear that they still have an active sexuality. Although there were variations in how sexuality was defined, the overwhelming consensus is that women who live a life of purity still have an active sexuality because it is something God-given. Gardner's (2011) interviews with purity pledgers reveals that abstinent individuals "may be waiting for sex, but they are certainly not waiting to express their sexuality" (p. 89). In other words, when it comes to a purity pledger's sexuality, it tends to fall into a gray area defying convention that an individual either has an active agency or not. However, when attempting to conceptualize a young woman's sexuality, one cannot simply gloss over the impact religious teachings have had on how the women in this study perceived their sexuality.

A feeling of sexuality was not consistently articulated by the participants in this study. That is, when asked about their sexuality, the majority of the participants struggled to express a strong indication of how they understand the term itself. Although most relied on the idea that as creations of God they inherently were sexual beings, getting descriptive beyond that was either vague or non-existent. One possible interpretation of this vague sense of sexuality is that the infrequent reflection on their sexuality may be tied to religious forms of sexual control. As revealed throughout the literature review, evangelical Protestant modesty advocates have provided clear guidelines as to how young women should (or should not) enact their sexuality outside the parameters of marriage (see Ethridge & Arterburn, 2004). In this study, the most prominent religious identification, non-denominational Christian, is situated in line with the ideology framework of evangelical Christian. Further, the second largest religious identification was Mormon and as found by Regnerus (2007), “Mormons outpace evangelicals in terms of the organization of sexual social control” (p. 23). The two largest types of religious background in this study are women who were exposed to religious discourses that are more likely to set strict standards on appropriate ways of conducting oneself sexually.

However, to claim that direct religious instruction and application of “social control” ignores the possibility that other message sources influence a woman’s inability to feel like she has active sexuality. For example, Tolman (2002) spoke to women who did not inherently identify as religious found various forms of fears and concerns of having a “silenced” sexuality. Since these young teens were not deeply religious, their fear of having a quieted sexuality stemmed from larger, mediated messages that still fall in line with evangelical, Protestant ideals about female sexuality outside of marriage. This comparison between Tolman’s (2002) non-religious participants and the devoted religious young women (except Babette) from this study

reinforces the significance religious messages have on perceptions of sexuality for young women. Trying to make sense of an individual's sexuality continues to be a complicated matter (Regnerus, 2007). However, what may be at play for these young women is how they prioritize their own personal goals in life and pull from various messages about sex and purity to help them obtain that goal. Framing one's sexuality through the lens of a "crystallized self" offers a unique and personalized perspective on how young women who make a purity pledge continue to make sense of who they are and who they wish to be. In other words, the analysis revealed that sexuality is not only situated within constructs of purity, but feminist beliefs of female empowerment and individualized agency.

When it comes to identity, sexual agency, and sexuality, this study's findings confirm the theoretics of a "crystallized self." More specifically, this project found that purity pledgers are capable of creating an individualized take on the sometimes contradictory subject positions of both modesty advocate and feminist rhetoric. Further, due to the limitations of language and meaning, the participants are only capable of resisting within what communicative constructs already exist. Especially when it comes to agency, this study found that by adopting a "crystallized self" purity pledgers' sense of agency is based on context and exposure to specific messages from religious teachings, parents, peers, and sex education classes. For purity pledgers, this means determining to what degree religious interests or societal expectations constrain other potential "truths" or "selves." Yet, this project's findings call into question and complicate an individual's agency within a "crystallized self:" is conforming more to one set of messages showing more agency than conforming to others? This illusion of "choice" requires more attention to the ways purity pledgers may have an actual voice in constructing their "crystallized" self. This possibility of actual voice leads to the practical implications of this study.

Practical Implications

There are several practical implications based on this study. First, on an organizational level, the findings of this study are applicable to churches and abstinence-only education. In regards to the former, half of the participants in this study were critical in speaking to the lack of education and guidance they received from their various churches. Since these young women had strong perceptions of deep religiosity, support from their churches would have provided them with more understanding of what the church (and subsequently, Christ) expects of them inside and outside the boundaries of matrimony. If churches as a whole desire for their young women to follow suit with the majority of the participants in this study, they should consider opening a space to encourage these types of conversations. Interestingly enough, since the three Mormon participants were able to talk in detail about how The Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) provides their youth with a number of educational options in relation to expectations of sex and relationship, other Protestant churches could follow suit so that younger women may feel like their church is invested in their sexual and relational future.

In terms of the latter, abstinence-only education played a key role in how these young women made sense of their sexuality and their purity. Even with the popularity and breadth of the modesty movement, more adolescents are exposed to abstinence-based messages in sex education courses (Regnerus, 2007). Therefore, abstinence-only education plays a vital role in educating young women about sex. Although only one participant spoke about her sex education class being one of the most defining moments during her journey of purity, in a broader sense, all the participants spoke to the benefits of understanding the negative repercussions of having pre-marital sex. Even though those harms are non-unique outside of marriage (unplanned pregnancies and STDs can occur within the ideal parental unit), the public school system could

benefit from recognizing the influence those sex education classes have on informing and ultimately shaping future sexual behaviors for young women.

On the familial level, this study provides a practical take-away for parents and daughters. On the one hand, mothers should continue to engage in the level of discussion and openness with their daughters because those conversations have a positive impact on how these young women continue to think about their sexuality. On the other hand, fathers should consider opening a space for them to have reflexive conversations with their daughters about sex. As parental communication continues to be an influential source of education and guidance for young women in relation to their sexual behaviors, both parents should decide early on how they wish to have these conversations with their daughters. The interviews from this study reveal that parent communication about sex and dating does have an impact on how these young women enacted their sexuality. Conversely, young women would also benefit from approaching their parents when it comes to having discussions about sex – especially with their fathers.

Finally, on a personal level, young women who have made a purity pledge and continue to experience their decision to live a pure life on a daily basis may be able to identify with the experiences articulated by the participants. More specifically, as mediated messages continue to focus on the binaries associated with women and their sexuality (slut versus prude, for example), this study provides a middle ground in which the actual lived experience of being a young woman is expressed. Although there were tensions that arose from these experiences of the participants, this study reveals that not all women may fall into a binary category, but instead, situate themselves as agents making active decisions in how they enact purity and their sexuality. In other words, this study hopefully allows young women who continue to live a life of purity know that they are not alone.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The bad girl lives an extremely loose moral life. She has sex out of marriage and does whatever sounds fun in the moment. She dates any guy who is “hot” and intentionally puts off marriage to keep her independence. She looks confident on the outside, but she’s falling apart on the inside. Her entire worth is wrapped up in how pretty she looks. As a result, she lives in a constant state of comparison and never feels like she measures up. Sleeping around seemed fun at first...until the doctor told her she contracted an STD. (Clark, 2015, para. 9-10)

This excerpt comes from a blog, *Girl Defined*, created by young Christian women to reach out to young women in the United States and instruct them on “the value of sexual purity” (Clark & Clark, 2016, para. 4). Like the majority of the participants in this study, these two sisters from Texas see their way of life as being oppositional to what is often portrayed in our mediated culture. In this particular blog post, “Naughty Girls Don’t Have Fun,” Clark (2015) attempts to strip away the “hyper-sexualized” ideals that are encouraging young women to become more promiscuous because it is what society expects of them. This position ultimately allows Clark to make the argument that “good girls” will live a fuller and happier life in Christ rather than living a life in a sexualized world. Like the modesty advocates, these two young women from Texas have adopted the health-based concerns as to why women should consider living a pure life as presented in scripture.

Identity work for the purity pledgers in this study appears to be a complicated and conflicting process when situated within the limitations of perceived agency. More broadly speaking, this study reveals how female purity pledgers negotiate and make sense of their identity, sexual agency, and sexuality. Due to the ongoing impact that religion has on these young women, churches should become more pragmatic in how they talk about sex and relationships to their young women. This implication is both practical and beneficial to religious

young women because silence within the organization of the church itself only complicates the lived experience of living a life of purity (Wood, 2007). Further, this position implies that young women should also do their part to open communication within their religious organizations. The same should also be spoken to with parent-daughter communication. As the church and parents continue to have a perceived impact on how young women think about sex and their own sexuality, both should open a space for honest communication about sex. Before detailing a need for future research, it is imperative that I note some of the limitations of this study.

Future Research

Future research should continue to analyze how communication, sexuality, and religion influence women's identity work in relation to messages about purity and sex (Sterk, 2011). With this study, I desired to gather the lived experiences of female purity pledgers. This meant creating a study that would allow me to interview these young women within one sitting to get that descriptive narrative. A longitudinal analysis should follow the lives of young women who have made purity pledges to gather a richer sense of continued lived experience. Since identity work is complex, a longitudinal analysis would provide a more detailed description of what it is like to live a life of purity. As noted throughout the analysis, negotiating purity and identity is a constant, circular process in which these young women are pulling pieces of discourse from various message sources and applying those messages to how they wish to live their lives. Although the study asked them to reflect back on aspects of their lives, the majority of the interview process and subsequent analysis relied heavily on past memories to derive that continuous reinstating of a pure life to God.

The overall goal of this project required me to interview a specific group of people. Although a variety of religious and geographical locations existed, all of the participants were

white. This racially homogenous group of participants does limit the breadth and depth of providing a description of what it is like to live a life of a purity. Further, all of the married participants were of the same faith which limits the implications of continuing to live a pure life within the realm of matrimony. Finally, in relation to the participants, there may have been some restrictions placed on the conversations because the topic may have positioned them to feel like they were defending or speaking on behalf of their religious ideology. In other words, since mediated discourse and reflections made by the participants themselves point to how they perceive or have been involved with judgement from others, instead of highlighting how they think about sex and sexuality, they may have desired to speak on behalf of their religious teachings. Yet, few academic endeavors inquire into why religion may matter for some and not others (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003).

In light of this, future inquiry should also examine how religion continues to impact how young women ascribe to religious-based messages about sex and relationships. Previous scholarship notes that purity pledges are most popular among evangelical Protestants and Mormons (Regnerus, 2007). Future research should unearth why this pattern is more common among these religious youths and not others and what social and personal implications may exist. Additionally, it would be interesting for future research to compare young women who have made purity pledgers to those who are still abstinent, but do not identify with the modesty movement. Speaking with these different groups may only further complicate the complex ways young women negotiate their identity within a postmodern framework.

Future research should also investigate how young men negotiate their identity, sexuality, and agency in relation to sex and purity. Since mediated messages about men's sexuality is different than women's, it is necessary to understand the tensions men may (or may not) grapple

with – just like the female participants in this study. Like young women in today’s world, young religious men are also exposed to a variety of messages that present different ways of viewing sex and relationships. Beginning with a phenomenological analysis of how young men live with a life of purity, this line of research could open a space for communication scholars to investigate the impact messages about sex have on how men negotiate their identities and sexuality.

As found in this study, daughters perceive that their parents talk to them differently when it comes to conversations about sex. Yet, most previous interpretative studies that look into parent-child communication lump mothers and father together as a parental unit which limits findings about these communicative interactions (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Further, these studies rely heavily on quantitative data to make claims about father-daughter and mother-daughter communication patterns and impacts (McKinney & Renk, 2008; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008; Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987). However, Manning’s (2014) qualitative analysis that examined how mothers, fathers, and daughters think about female sexuality and purity provides the possibility for a line of research that focuses on the different ways fathers and mothers communicate and think about these phenomenon. Therefore, future research should begin looking at fathers and mothers as different sources of messages about sex. Secondly, this line of inquiry should be examined qualitatively so that clear articulations can be derived about how both fathers and daughters think about sex and relationships. Allowing a dialogue between parents and their children to be expressed could deepen our understanding of father-daughter and mother-daughter communication specific to the topics of sex and purity.

In the end, by adopting a phenomenological approach, this study aimed to provide a rich description of what it is like to make a purity pledge and how this shapes the ways young women express their identity, sexual agency, and sexuality. This study revealed that identity work and

intrapersonal negotiations continue to influence perceptions of sexuality and sexual agency. As modesty advocates and feminist/critical scholars continue to operate in opposition of each other, young women will continue to find themselves feeling pressured to ascribe to one of these sides. As found in this study, the majority of the participants positioned themselves in line with the modesty rhetoric which presents specific ways of thinking about female sexuality, agency, and identity. However, parents, peers, the media, and sex education classes continue to be primary agents of socialization for children and teens which influence these young women as adults (Carpenter, 2005; Gardner, 2011; Regnerus et al., 2003; Tolman, 2002).

Ultimately, this study opens a space for young women to speak willingly and honestly about their experiences in a culture that has plenty to say about female sexuality and morality without taking into consideration the complexity of identity and agency. Given the personal experiences tied to purity pledges expressed by Freeman and Pugsley in chapter one, the young women in this study, and myself, living a life of purity is perhaps best understood through the framework of a “crystallized self.” Although all our experiences are different, what I realized as a researcher (and young woman) is that to tell us that we have no agency ignores the active decisions we have made and continue to make. In light of this, the findings of this study reveal the unique and empowering ways young women continue to negotiate their identity and agency after making a committed decision to live a life of purity.

References

- Abrudan, E. (2011). The dynamics of postmodern identity. *Journal of Media Research, 1*, 23-32. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=21&sid=945d9a40-7905-4fd4-998a-bdbbe8766071%40sessionmgr4003&hid=4114>
- Abrudan, E. (2012). Postmodern identity. Image, fashion and new technologies. *Journal of Media Research, 1*, 3-14. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=945d9a40-7905-4fd4-998a-bdbbe8766071%40sessionmgr4003&vid=19&hid=4114>
- Alter, T., & Walter, S. (2007). Introduction. In T. Alter & S. Walter (Eds.), *Phenomenal concepts and phenomenal knowledge* (pp. 3-11). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation). In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 142-147, 166-176. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- American Civil Liberties Union (2015). Abstinence-only curricula. *ACLU*. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/issues/reproductive-freedom/abstinence-only-curricula>
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*, 469-480. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469
- Barker, J. (2001, July 26). A is for abstinence. *Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2001-07-26/news/0107260236_1_abstinence-frederick-county-pledge-cards
- Baxter, L., & Babbie, E. (2003). *The basics of communication research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Bay-Cheng, L. (2003). The trouble of teen sex: The construction of adolescent sexuality through school-based sexuality education. *Sex Education, 3*, 61-74. doi: 10.1080/1468181032000052162
- Bernstein, N. (2004, March 7). Young love, new caution: Behind fall in pregnancy, a new teenage culture of restraint. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/07/nyregion/young-love-new-caution-first-two-articles-behind-fall-pregnancy-new-teenage.html?pagewanted=1>
- Breshers, S. (2007). Abstinence - what?: A critical look at the language of educational approaches to adolescent sexual risk reduction. *Journal of School Health, 77*, 637-639. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2007.00244.x
- Brownback, L. (2010). *Purity: A godly woman's adornment*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

- Bruckner, H., & Bearman, P. (2005). After the promise: The STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 36*, 271-278. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2005.01.005
- Bruni, F. (2013). Sexism and the single murderess. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/opinion/sunday/bruni-sexism-and-the-single-murderess.html?ref=frankbruni&_r=1
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Carpenter, L. M. (2005). *Virginity lost: An intimate portrait of first sexual experiences*. New York: New York University Press.
- Carpenter, L. M. (2011). Like a virgin...again?: Secondary virginity as an ongoing gender social construction. *Sexuality & Culture, 15*, 115-140. doi: 10.1007/s12119-010-9085-7
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2000). *Health, United States*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Center for Disease Control. (2014). Reported STDs in the United States: 2013 National data for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats13/std-trends-508.pdf>
- Center for Disease Control. (2015). How you can prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/std/prevention/>
- Chara, P. J., & Kuennen, L. M. (1994). Diverging gender attitudes regarding casual sex: A cross-sectional study. *Psychological Reports, 74*, 57-58. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1994.74.1.57
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clark, K. (2015). Why naughty girls don't have more fun. *Girl Defined*. Retrieved from <http://www.girldefined.com/naughty-girls-dont-have-fun>
- Clark, K., & Clark, B. (2016). Meet us. *Girl Defined*. Retrieved from <http://www.girldefined.com/meet-us>
- Condit, C. M. (1994). Hegemony in a mass-mediated society: Concordance about reproductive technologies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 11*, 205-230. doi: 10.1080/15295039409366899
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and Quantitative designs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*

- (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Debold, E. (1996). *Knowing bodies: Gender identity, cognitive development, and embodiment in early childhood and early adolescence*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation,) Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.
- Debold, E., Wilson, M., & Malave, I. (1993). *Mother daughter revolution: From good girls to great women*. New York: Random House.
- Deetz, S. A. (1973). Words without things: Toward a social phenomenology of language, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59, 40-51. doi: 10.1080/00335637309383152
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* (4th ed., pp. 1-41). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dicker, R. (2008). *A history of U.S. feminisms*. Berkeley: Seal Press.
- Dicker, R., & Piepmeier, A. (2003). Introduction, in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, R. Dicker & A. Piepmeier (Eds.). Boston: Northeastern University Press. 3-28.
- Dillion, M. (2010). Can postsecular society tolerate religious differences? *Sociology of Religion*, 71, 139-156. doi: 10.1093/socrel/srq024
- Doan, A. E., & Williams, J. C. (2008). *The politics of virginity: Abstinence in sex education*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Dow, B. J. (1999). Spectacle, spectatorship and gender anxiety in the television news coverage of the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality. *Communication Studies*, 50, 143-157. Doi:
- Duerringer, C. (2013). The "War on Christianity": Counterpublicity or hegemonic containment? *Southern Communication Journal*, 78, 311-325. doi: 10.1080/1041794X.2013.792866
- Dumenil, L. (2012). *The Oxford encyclopedia of American social history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Einstein, M. (2008). *Brands of faith: Marketing religion in a commercial age*. New York: Routledge.
- Engelman, P. C. (2011). *A history of the birth control movement in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Ethridge, S., & Arterburn, S. (2004). *Every young woman's battle*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press.

- Fahs, B. (2010). Daddy's little girls: On the perils of chastity clubs, purity balls, and ritualized abstinence. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 31, 116-142. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/frontiers/v031/31.3.fahs.html>
- Father-daughter purity ball (2007). Retrieved from <http://generationsoflight.com/html/index.html>
- Filipovic, J. (2013). Purity culture: Bad for women, worse for survivors of sexual assault. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/09/elizabeth-smart-purity-culture-shames-survivors-sexual-assault>
- Fine, M. (1988). Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire. *Harvard Education Review*, 58, 29-53. Retrieved from <http://www.hepgjournals.org/doi/abs/10.17763/haer.58.1.u0468k1v2n2n8242>
- Finer, L. B. (2007). Trends in premarital sex in the United States, 1954-2003. *Public Health Report*, 122, 73-78. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1802108/>
- Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 1-22. doi: 10.1080/03637758409390180
- Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (1994). Personal experience as evident in feminist scholarship. *Western Journal of Communication*, 58, 39-43. doi: 10.1080/10570319409374482
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality, vol. 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage (Original work published 1978)
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (109-142). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Freitag, J. L. (2011). Daddy's little girl: A provocative feminist critique of purity balls. *Kaleidoscope*, 10, 57-71. Retrieved from <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=kaleidoscope>
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gallagher, S. (2012). *Phenomenology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

- Gordon, L. (2002). *Moral property of women: A history of birth control politics in America* (3rd Edition). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Guba, E. (1990). *The paradigm dialogue*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gardner, C. (2011). *Making chastity sexy: The rhetoric of evangelical abstinence campaigns*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hahner, L. (2008). Proceedings from NCA '08: *The new modesty movement and the limits of rhetorical agency*. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6dafa8a2-fb4e-498f-9953-dbb45cb0bff3%40sessionmgr4002&vid=4&hid=4109>
- Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., Osterman, M. J. K., & Curtin, S. C. (2015). Births: Final data for 2013. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_01.pdf
- Hardy, S. A., & Raffaelli, M. (2003). Adolescent religiosity and sexuality: An investigation of reciprocal influences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 26, 731-739. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2003.09.003
- Hayt, E. (2002). It's never too late to be a virgin. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/04/style/it-s-never-too-late-to-be-a-virgin.html?pagewanted=all>
- Hendershot, H. (2004). *Shaking the world for Jesus: Media and conservative evangelical culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hoge, D. R., Johnson, B., & Luidens, D. B. (1993). Determinants of church involvement of young adults who grew up in Presbyterian churches. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 32, 242-255. doi: 10.2307/1386663
- Horan, P. F., Phillips, J., & Hagan, N.E. (1998). The meaning of abstinence for college students. *Journal of HIV/AIDS Prevention & Education for Adolescents and Children*, 2, 51-66. doi: 10.1300/J129v02n02_04
- Houghtaling, M. K. (2013). *Materiality, becoming, and time: The existential phenomenology of sexuality* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (NS28129.)

- Hull, S. J., Hennessy, M., Bleakley, A., Fishbein, M., & Jordan, A. (2011). Identifying the causal pathways from religiosity to delayed adolescent sexual behavior. *Journal of Sex Research, 48*, 543-553. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2010.521868
- Jaccard, J., & Dittus, P. (1991). *Parent-teen communication: Toward the prevention of unintended pregnancies*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Kellner, D. (2003). *Media culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics between the modern and postmodern*. London: Routledge.
- Kelly, K. C. (2000). *Performing virginity and testing chastity in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge.
- Kendall, J., & Jones, D. (2005). *Lady in waiting: Becoming God's best while waiting for Mr. Right*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers.
- Kipnis, L. (2006). *The female thing: Dirt, sex, envy, vulnerability*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Koenig, M., & de Guchtenerie, P. F. A. (2007). *Democracy and human rights in multicultural societies*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Kvale, S. (2003). The dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*, 480-500. doi: 10.1177/1077800406286235
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lamb, S. (2010). Feminist ideals for a healthy female adolescent sexuality: A critique. *Sex Roles, 62*, 294-306. doi: 10.1007/s11199-009-9698-1
- Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretive phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 102-120. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp062oa
- Lewin, T. (2002, September 29). More in high school are virgins, study finds. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/29/us/more-in-high-school-are-virgins-study-finds.html>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lundberg, C. (2009). Enjoying God's death: The Passion of the Christ and the practices of an Evangelical public. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 95, 387-411. doi: 10.1080/00335630903296184
- Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva. (1996). *Sex & existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The second sex.'* Translated by Linda Schenck. London: The Athlone Press.
- Lynch, G., Mitchell, J., & Strhan, A. (2012). Introduction, in *Religion, Media, and Culture: A Reader*. G. Lynch, J. Mitchell, & A. Strahan (Eds.). New York: Routledge.
- Manning, J. (2009). Because the personal is political: Politics and unpacking the rhetoric of (queer) relationships. In K. German & B. Drechsel (Eds.) *Queer identities/political realities* (p. 1-8). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars.
- Manning, J. (2013). Interpretive theorizing in the seductive world of sexuality and interpersonal communication: Getting guerilla with studies of sexting and purity rings. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 2507–2520. Retrieved from <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/2250/1023>
- Manning, J. (2015). Paradoxes of (im)purity: Affirming heteronormativity and queering heterosexuality in family discourses of purity pledges. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 38, 99-117. doi: 10.1080/07491409.2014.954687
- Manning, J., & Kunkel, A. (2014). *Researching interpersonal relationships: Qualitative methods, studies, and analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martin, K. (1996). *Puberty, sexuality, and the self: Girls and boys at adolescence*. New York: Routledge.
- Martinez, J. M. (2011). *Communicative sexualities: A communicology of sexual experience*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Marton, F. (1988). Describing and improving learning. In R. R. Schmeck (Ed.), *Learning strategies and learning styles* (pp. 53-82). New York: Plenum Press
- McKinney, C., & Renk, K. (2008). Differential parenting between mothers and fathers: Implication for late adolescents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29, 806-827. doi: 10.1177/0192513X07311222
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (2004). *Phenomenology of perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. New York: Routledge.

- Miller, D. E. (1997). *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the new millennium*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mohney, G. (2015). Couple happy that 'purity certificate' stirred up debate about premarital sex. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/couple-happy-purity-certificate-stirred-debate-premarital-sex/story?id=34662821>
- Monro, S. (2005). Beyond male and female: Poststructuralism and the spectrum of gender. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 8, 3-21. doi: 10.1300/J485v08n01_02
- Moslener, S. (2015). *Virgin nation: Sexual purity and American adolescents*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mumby, D. K. (1997). The problem of hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for organizational communication studies. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61, 343-375. Retrieved from http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/the_problem_of_hegemony_rereading_gramsci_for_organizational_communication_studies.pdf
- Nelson, C., Treichler, P. A., & Grossberg, L. (1992). Cultural studies: An introduction. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. A. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 1-16). New York: Routledge.
- Nicholson, L. (1997). Introduction. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *The second wave: A reader in feminist theory* (pp. 1-5). New York: Routledge.
- Nikolchev, A. (2010). A brief history of the birth control pill. *PBS*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/health/a-brief-history-of-the-birth-control-pill/480/>
- Nynas, P., & Yip, A. K-. T. (2012). Reframing the intersection between religion, gender, and sexuality in everyday life, in *Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in Everyday Life*. P. Nynas & A. K-. T. (Eds.). Surrey: Ashgate.
- Office of Adolescent Health. (2015). Trends in teen pregnancy and childbearing. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/reproductive-health/teen-pregnancy/trends.html>
- Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 274-287. doi: 10.1080/00335638409383697
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- PBS Online News Hour. (2006). South Dakota abortion ban. Retrieved from www.pbs.org/newshour
- Poirot, K. (2004). Mediating a movement, authorizing discourse: Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, and feminism's second wave. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 27, 204-235. doi: 10.1080/07491409.2004.10162473
- Poirot, K. (2009). Domesticating the liberated woman: Containment rhetorics of second wave radical/lesbian feminism. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 32, 263-292. doi: 10.1080/07491409.2009.10162391
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.
- Pugsley, S. (2014). It happened to me: I waited until my wedding night to lose my virginity and I wish I hadn't. Retrieved from www.xojane.com/sex/true-love-waits-pledge
- Punyanunt-Carter, N. M. (2008). Father-daughter relationships: Examining family communication patterns and interpersonal communication satisfaction. *Communication Research Reports*, 20, 23-33. doi: 10.1080/08824090701831750
- Racher, F. (2003). Using conjoint interviews to research the lived experience of elderly rural couples. *Nurse Researcher*, 19, 60-72. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.7748/nr2003.04.10.3.60.c5898>
- Racher, F., & Robinson, S. (2003). Are phenomenology and postpositivism strange bedfellows? *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 25, 464-481. doi: 10.1177/0193945903253909
- Regnerus, M. D. (2007). *Forbidden fruit: Sex and religion in the lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Regnerus, M. D., Rostosky, S. S., & Comer-Wright, M. L. (2003). Coital debut: The role of religiosity and sex attitudes in the Add Health Survey. *Journal of Sex Research*, 40, 358-367. doi: 10.1080/00224490209552202
- Rennie, D. L. (1999). Qualitative research: A matter of hermeneutics and the sociology of knowledge. In M. Kopal & L. A. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Richardson, J. E. (1999). The concepts and methods of phenomenographic research. *Review of Educational Research*, 69, 53-82. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/pdf/1170644.pdf?acceptTC=true>

- Rostosky, S. S., Wilcox, B. L., Wright, M. L. C., & Randall, B.A. (2004). The impact of religiosity on adolescent sexual behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19*, 677-697. doi: 10.1177/0743558403260019
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sanger, M. (1919). A parents' problem or woman's?. *Birth Control Review, 6-7*. Retrieved from <https://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/webedition/app/documents/show.php?sangerDoc=226268.xml>
- Sawyer, R. G., Howard, D. E., Brewster-Jordan, J., Gavin, M., & Sherman, M. (2007). "We didn't have sex...did we?:" College students' perceptions of abstinence. *American Journal of Health Studies, 22*, 46-55. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/openview/74270ef2bfd9e1f24f968f8bd0cf1ccb/1?pq-origsite=gscholar>
- Scheffler, T., & Naus, P. (1999). The relationship between fatherly affirmation and a woman's self-esteem, fear of intimacy, comfort with womanhood and comfort with sexuality. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 8*, 39-45. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/docview/220823200?accountid=11789>
- Schwartz, P., & Rutter, V. (1998). *The gender of sexuality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Segrin, C., & Flora, J. (2011). *Family communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Shalit, W. (1999). *A return to modesty: Discovering the lost virtue*. New York: Free Press.
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (2015). A history of federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. *SIECUS*. Retrieved from <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1340&nodeid=1>
- Silver ring thing (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.silverringthing.com/>
- Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11*, 261-271. doi: 10.1080/08870449608400256
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003) Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In Smith, J.A., (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, J. M. (2013). Philanthropic identity at work: Employer influences on the charitable giving attitudes and behaviors of employees. *Journal of Business Communication, 50*, 128-151. doi: 10.1177/0021943612474989

- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sterk, H. M. (2010). Faith, feminism, and scholarship. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 33, 206-216. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=e259337c-ca21-4f72-8295-4a9eb4a93f5a%40sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4114>
- Stewart, J. (1972). Concepts of language and meaning: A comparative study, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58, 123-133. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=377b341f-b08d-4309-bea1-9eca3d1c8f68%40sessionmgr112&vid=1&hid=128>
- Surra, C. A., & Hughes, D. K. (1997). Commitment processes in account of the development of premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59, 5-21. doi: 10.2307/353658
- Teachman, J. (2003). Premarital sex, premarital cohabitation, and the risk of subsequent marital dissolution among women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 444-455. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/3600089>
- Tolman, D. L. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Tracy, S. J., & Trethewey, A. (2005). Fracturing the real-self/fake-self dichotomy: Moving towards crystallized organizational identities. *Communication Theory*, 15, 168-195. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00331.x
- Tresniowski, A., Bass, S., Bane, V., & Slania, J. (2002, September, 9). Like a virgin (sort of). *People*. Retrieved from <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20137929,00.html>
- True love waits (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/History/True-Love-Waits/c/N-1z0zq7rZ1z13wiu?intcmp=TLWMain-Hero-History-20131216>
- United Nations Statistics Division. (2015). *Demographic yearbook 2013*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2013/Table10.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2015). Sexually transmitted diseases. Retrieved from <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/reproductive-health/stds.html>
- Valenti, J. (2010). *The purity myth: How America's obsession with virginity is hurting young women*. Berkeley: Seal.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience*. New York: State University of New York Press.

- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: Free Press.
- Wimberley, D. W. (1989). Religion and role-identity: A structural symbolic interactionist conceptualization of religiosity. *Sociological Quarterly*, 30, 125-142. doi: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.1989.tb01515.x
- White, H. R. (2012). Virgin pride: Born again faith and sexual identity in the faith-based abstinence movement. In S. J. Hunt & A. Yip (Eds.), *Ashgate Research Companion to Contemporary Religion and Sexuality* (241-251). Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- White, K. (1993). *The first sexual revolution: The emergence of male heterosexuality in modern America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Wood, J. T. (2007). *Interpersonal communication: Everyday encounters* (7th ed.). Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Yabroff, J. (2007, July 23). Girls going mild(er): A new “modesty movement” aims to teach young women they don’t have to be bad, or semiclad. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19762075/site/newsweek/>
- Youniss, J., & Ketterlinus, R. D. (1987). Communication and connectedness in mother- and father adolescent relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 16, 263-280. doi: 10.1007/BF02139094

Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Sample Question Pool

1. What are your thoughts on how our society talks about sex?
2. What about abstinence?
3. Tell me about the moment when you decided to make a pledge to remain pure/abstinent.
4. How did you make your pledge (privately, at a convention, at church, etc.)?
5. Tell me in as much detail as possible about your experience when you made your pledge to be pure.
6. What influenced your decision to make this choice?
7. When you made your pledge, what did purity mean to you?
8. Has your meaning of these words changed since you made your pledge? If so, in what ways?
9. Do you think religion played a significant role in your decision? Explain why or why not.
10. Did you think your church gave you the necessary information to make your purity pledge? Explain why or why.
11. Were you ever concerned about how people might view you differently after you made your pledge?
12. Could you describe some of the reactions you got from others once they knew that you made your pledge?
 - a. Did you ever have to deal with negative reactions from people once they knew you made your pledge? If so, provide an example.
 - b. Think of a moment when you were proud to have made your pledge. Tell me about it in as much detail as you can.

13. What about a time when you became uncertain about your decision to remain abstinent?
14. In what ways have these various messages influenced your decision to remain pure or not?
15. Tell me about a time when you were involved in a romantic relationship in which you struggled with your pledge.
 - a. How did that experience make you feel?
16. How did you communicate your boundaries with boyfriends/significant others?
17. How does making a purity pledge still influence you today?
18. In the end, were you happy about your decision to make a purity pledge? Please explain why.
19. How have all of these experiences shaped how you view yourself and your sexuality?
20. In what ways do you see yourself as a sexual being?

Debriefing Protocol

That is our time. I must thank you for your time and thoughtful responses. The interview you just gave is part of my master's thesis project. This project is interested in how women who have made purity pledges make sense and give meaning to their personal experiences tied to purity, abstinence, and sexuality. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the final analysis of all the interviews, you are more than welcome to contact me at khanna@k-state.edu. Do you have any questions? Once again, thank you for your time.